

THE MASTERPIECES OF GEORGE SAND  
Volumes XV & XVI

# HANDSOME LAURENCE

TRANSLATED BY  
GEORGE BURNHAM IVES

PHILADELPHIA  
PRINTED FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY BY  
GEORGE BARRIE & SON  
moulin digital editions



2023

COPYRIGHT, 1902, BY GEORGE BARRIE & SON

# HANDSOME LAURENCE

(Sequel to "A Rolling Stone")

## I

Laurence had been talking for two hours, and the sympathetic feeling he aroused in me caused me to take a very deep interest in his adventures; however, I remembered that he must be fatigued, and I took him to dine with me at my inn, where, having recovered his energy, he resumed his narrative.

We stopped, he said, as I was on the point of starting for Italy with Bellamare's troupe

Before leaving Toulon, I attended a closing performance which seemed to me very extraordinary. When the public was pleased with a troupe which had passed some time in a place, it was the custom to manifest its gratitude and say farewell by tossing presents on the stage. On the occasion in question there was a little of everything, from bouquets to puddings. Every trade gave specimens of its handiwork: fabrics, stockings, night-caps, household utensils, articles of food, hats, shoes, fruits, cutlery, and heaven knows what. The stage was covered with them, and some were caught on the fly by the musicians, who did not return them. I need not tell you that this patriarchal custom is almost forgotten to-day.

Everything went well at the outset of our journey. Bellamare, sacrificing his impatience to press forward, consented to pass through Italy, where we made some fairly profitable stands. We played: *L'Aventurière*, *Il ne faut jurer de rien*, *Les Folies Amoureuses*, *Le Verre d'Eau*, *La Vie de Bohème*, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *Un Duel sous Richelieu*, *La Corde Sensible*, *Jobin et Nanette*, and I don't know what else. At that time, Monsieur Scribe, who was beginning to be unfashionable in France, was all the rage abroad, and in some small places we had to place the names of Scribe and Mélesville at the head of the posters in order to obtain a hearing for the works of Molière or Beaumarchais. In like manner, in order to create a taste for the burlesque *chansonnettes* which Marco sang between the acts, we had to compromise the names of Béranger and Désaugiers.

It was at Florence that I had an adventure which I now remember simply as a dream. It will seem very surprising to you; but when you learn of the events which succeeded one another with startling rapidity immediately after that adventure, you will understand why it did not leave a deeper impression on my mind.

As we were on the point of leaving that city, I received the following note:

"I have applauded you both; be happy with HER.

"THE UNKNOWN."

I begged Bellamare to tell me whether he had seen the countess during our stay in Florence. He swore that he had not, and as his word could always be depended on, that fact was established. Florence was not then so populous as to make the prospect of obtaining information by asking questions altogether hopeless.

“Would you like to stay behind?” Bellamare asked me.

I already had my foot in the stirrup as they say, and so, although I was greatly excited, I determined to do nothing.

“You see,” said I, “that she is still persuaded that I intended to deceive her; I can not accept that situation and I will not.”

And I left Florence, not without an effort, I confess, but firmly believing that my pride did me honor.

There had been some discussion as to whether we should go to Venice and Trieste as we had done the year before; but destiny turned us in the direction best suited to its ends. A letter from Signor Zamorini placed at our disposal a wretched vessel of considerable size, re-joining in the title of *tartan*, which was supposed to take us from Ancona to Corfu at half rates. There we could give a number of performances, which, on the same terms of an equal division of profits and expenses between the *entrepreneur* and ourselves, would furnish us with the wherewithal to proceed to Constantinople.

The craft in question was a very ill-looking affair, and the skipper, a species of Jew who called himself a Greek, seemed more loquacious and fawning than honest and intelligent; but we had no choice in the matter, as he had made the bargain with Zamorini through the medium of another skipper at Corfu, who was to take us farther on our journey.

We gave a performance at Ancona, and as we left the theatre, the master of the *Halcyon*—such was the poetic name borne by that vile craft—came and told us that we must set sail at daybreak. We had not expected to start until the second day after, and nothing was ready; but he informed us that the weather was very uncertain at that season, that we must make the most of the favorable wind then blowing, and not delay until unfavorable winds should make it necessary to postpone our departure indefinitely. It was the latter part of February.

The women were told to pack their trunks and seize a few hours’ sleep; the men of the company undertook to carry all the luggage on board the *Halcyon*. We passed the night at the task, for there was a large quantity of luggage. In addition to our costumes and our personal effects, we had some pieces of scenery which were indispensable in places where the theatre provided nothing except its four walls; also a large quantity of bulky properties, musical instruments, and food supplies; for we might be several days at sea, and we had been told that we should find nothing at all to eat at the ports of call on the coast of Dalmatia and Albania.

The *Halcyon's* skipper had a cargo of merchandise which completely filled the hold, so that we were compelled to pile our luggage on the deck—an annoying condition of affairs, but very fortunate, as the sequel will prove.

At daybreak, when we were all completely exhausted, we raised our anchor, and bore rapidly away for Brindisi, before a stiff northerly wind. We travelled almost as fast as a steamboat. We left Ancona on a Thursday and had a fair prospect of reaching Corfu on the following Monday or Tuesday.

But the wind changed toward evening of the day we sailed and carried us out to sea at an alarming rate of speed. We expressed some uneasiness to the captain. His craft did not seem strong enough to weather so heavy a sea and to cross the Adriatic at its widest point. He replied that the *Halcyon* was equal to a cruise around the world, and that if we did not succeed in making Brindisi, we should have no difficulty in reaching Ragusa or Antivari on the opposite shore. He swore that the wind was a little to the west of north and was likely to blow harder from that quarter. He was mistaken, or else he lied. The wind drove us due east for about forty hours, and as, despite an exceedingly disagreeable pitching, we moved very fast, we recovered confidence, and instead of resting, we did nothing but laugh and sing until the following night. At that time the wind changed to the eastward, and our pilot informed us that that was a good sign, as the wind blew off shore almost every night on the Dalmatian coast. So that we were approaching land; but what land was it? We had no idea, and the crew knew no more about it than we did.

During the evening we simply coasted along at a respectful distance from the rocky shores of a multitude of small islands, whose dark shapes were outlined against a leaden sky. The moon set early, and the captain, who pretended that he recognized certain lighthouses, no longer recognized anything at all. The sky became dark, the pitching was succeeded by rolling, and it seemed to us that the sailors were trying to put out to sea again. We lost our patience with them, for we wanted to land somewhere, no matter where; we had had enough of the sea and our cramped quarters. Léon tranquillized us by assuring us that it was much better to stand off and on all night than to sail near the innumerable reefs that lay along the coast of the Adriatic. We resigned ourselves to the necessities of the situation. I sat down with Léon on the luggage, and we talked about the necessity of preparing a large number of plays for the campaign. We were less likely than in Italy to fall in with artists to reinforce us, and it seemed to me that our troupe was very small in view of Bellamare's projects.

"Bellamare relies upon me," said Léon, "to mutilate and revamp from morning till night, and I have agreed to undertake that detestable task. It is not difficult. Nothing is so easy as to ruin somebody's else work; but it is a heart-breaking business, and it depresses me so that I would sell the rest of my life for a pin-point."

## HANDSOME LAURENCE

I tried to comfort him; but our conversation was interrupted every moment. The sea became more and more disagreeable, and the sailors as they moved about forced us to shift our position every instant. About midnight the wind began to blow from all quarters at once, and the captain admitted that he could no longer steer with any certainty.

He began to lose his head; he lost it completely when a light shock, followed by another more violent one, warned us that we were on the reefs. I do not know whether it would have been possible to drop an anchor and wait for daylight, or to do anything to save us; however that may be, the *Halcyon* was allowed to drift on the rocks. The poor vessel did not struggle long; a still more violent shock, accompanied by an ominous cracking, speedily convinced us that we were lost. The hold began to fill, the stern was crushed. We drove forward a few feet farther, then suddenly came to a standstill, caught fast between two rocks upon one of which I jumped, carrying Impéria in my arms. My comrades followed my example and saved the other women. It was lucky that we thought of them and of ourselves, for the skipper and his crew had no thought for anything but their cargo, and strove vainly to save it, paying no heed to us. The tartan, caught between the rocks, plunged up and down like a frantic animal; her timbers still held out, and we had time to save everything on the deck; after half an hour devoted to that task with feverish zeal, luckily crowned with success, the *Halcyon*, raised by the waves, which constantly increased in size and force, freed herself from her confinement with a backward leap, as if to take a fresh start and clear the obstacle; then, once more driven forward, she struck heavily again; but by this time she was half under water, her keel was torn off and her masts gone by the board. A tremendous wave lifted up all that remained of the ill-fated vessel, and hurled on the rock where we had taken refuge a part of the rigging and some fragments of the poop; the rest was swallowed up by the sea. They had failed to save any part of the contents of the hold.

The little island on which we were cast and of which I have never been able to learn the name—perhaps it hadn't any—was perhaps five hundred yards long and a hundred wide. It consisted of a calcareous stone, as white as marble, and its shores were perpendicular on all sides, except for one small inlet, where the sea entered and formed a microscopic roadstead strewn with detached boulders, representing in miniature the archipelago of which our reef formed a part.

It was due to this little roadstead, into which the sea had capriciously driven us, that we were able to get ashore; but at first we had no leisure to examine our place of refuge, either within or without. In the beginning we believed that we were on the mainland, and we were greatly surprised to find that we were prisoners on an isolated rock. So far as I myself was concerned, I had no sort of comprehension of the dangers of our situation. I did not for an instant doubt that we should easily make our escape, and, while Bellamare made the tour

of the island, to try to find out something about it, I sought and found a place of shelter for the women—a sort of great natural bowl hollowed out of the rock, where they were out of reach of the wind. You can imagine that they were in a terrible state of alarm and panic. Impéria alone retained her presence of mind and tried to keep up their courage. Régine turned pious and recited prayers. Anna had hysterical attacks, and made our situation more distressing by her piercing shrieks. In vain did Bellamare, calm and fearless, tell her that we were safe. She would not listen to him, and did not become calmer until Moranbois threatened to throw her into the sea. Fear acted on her as on children: she begged to be forgiven, wept and subsided.

When we were sure that no one was hurt, and every member of the company had answered to his or her name, for it was still very dark, we decided to consult with the master of the tartan as to ways and means of making our escape from that unpleasant place of refuge.

“Means of escape?” he said in a desperate tone; “there isn’t any! This is the infernal *bora*, the worst of all winds, which is blowing now, God knows for how many days, between us and the mainland. And then, my dear sirs, there’s another thing! The *vila* has cast her spell on us, and whatever we may attempt will turn against us.”

“The *vila*!” said Bellamare, “is that another contrary wind? One is quite enough, I should say!”

“No, no, *signor mio*, it isn’t a wind, it’s something much worse; it’s the wicked fairy who drags ships onto the reefs and laughs to see them broken in pieces. Do you hear her? I do! That noise isn’t made by the sea beating on the shingle. There’s no shingle on these steep shores. It’s the laugh of the infamous *vila*, I tell you; her evil laugh, her death laugh!”

“Where are we, tell me that, you idiot?” said Bellamare, shaking the superstitious seaman.

The poor wretch had no idea, and repeated again and again: “*Scoglio maledetto! pietra del Diavolo!*” so that we were at liberty to consider either of those despairing epithets as the name of our rock. That did not help us in the least. The important point was to identify that part of the coast off which we were cast away, where there seemed to be no light-houses. The skipper questioned his men. One said Zara, another said Spalatro. The skipper shrugged his shoulders and said Ragusa.

“Well, we seem to be anchored here,” said Bellamare, with a doleful smile.

“That’s not so sure,” observed Moranbois. “When we get ashore we’ll see where we are. It’s not such a devil of a job to make a raft with the wreckage of the tartan!”

The captain shook his head, his two men did the same, sat down on the wreckage and held their peace.

“Let’s wake them up; let’s beat them,” said Moranbois, with an oath. “They must either speak or obey.”

In reply to our threats they said at last that we mustn't stir, nor show ourselves, nor make a sound; for the wind was beginning to subside, and if we happened to be in the neighborhood of the archipelago of Almissa, which is infested with pirates, we should attract their attention and should infallibly be robbed and murdered. We must wait till daylight, for those cutthroats were bold only when it was dark.

"What!" cried Léon, indignantly; "there are ten of us men, all armed to some extent, and you believe that we are afraid of sea-rovers! Nonsense! Get your tools at once and let us set to work. If you refuse to help us, here is one of our own number who will show us how, and we will do without you."

He pointed to Moranbois, who had lived long enough among the wharves of Toulon to have a working knowledge of such matters, and he set about building the raft without waiting for the skipper's assent. Léon, Lambesq, Marco and I took orders from him and worked zealously, while Bellamare attended to getting the weapons together and loading them. He did not believe that the skipper's fears were altogether illusory, and thought that our shipwreck might very well attract the pirates of those seas if we happened to be far from a harbor.

The captain looked on while we worked. The loss of his cargo had demoralized him completely. Standing in much less fear of the sea than of men, he was terribly grieved to see us light a torch and begin to hammer noisily at the débris of the *Halcyon*.

"We mustn't make any mistake," said Moranbois to me; "with this paltry bit of cordage and these contemptible splinters of wood, we can't make a raft for fifteen persons; if we succeed in making one to hold four, the skies will fall. But let us keep at work, and if it won't hold anyone but me, I will agree to make use of it to go in search of help."

I took advantage of a moment's breathing space to run , to see what the women were doing. They were huddled together like birds in the nest, shivering with cold, while we were drenched with perspiration. I urged them to walk, but not one of them felt the courage to do it, and for the first time Impéria was despondent.

"Is it possible, you?" I said.

"I am thinking of my father," was her reply; "if we do not succeed in escaping from this place, who will support him?"

"I will," I answered, declaiming a passage from a modern drama; "he shall have Beppo's friendship if Beppo escapes!"

I was as gay as a lark; but the rest of the night must have seemed mortally long to those poor shipwrecked women. To us men it passed like a flash, and the sun took us by surprise when we had been working four hours without a thought of time. No pirates had appeared and the raft was afloat; Moranbois took command, and went aboard with the captain and one of the sailors. There was room for only three, and Moranbois would trust no one but himself to bring us speedy assistance. With deep emotion we watched him leap aboard that



wretched plank, refusing to bid any of us good-bye, and without the slightest sign of uneasiness. The sea raged fiercely around the reef; but we saw, a few miles away, a long line of rocks which we took to be the Dalmatian coast, and we hoped that our friend would make the passage in a very short time. We were greatly surprised therefore to see that the raft, instead of going in that direction, headed out to sea and soon disappeared behind the huge waves which made our range of vision very narrow. The fact was that what we took for the shore was simply a series of reefs more dangerous than that on which we were; we were convinced of it when the morning mist cleared away. We were in a genuine *no thoroughfare*, surrounded by islands higher than our own which cut off the horizon entirely on the land side, except for a few pink and white spots which we could see in the distance; they were the peaks of some of the Dalmatian Alps, which we had already seen from the Italian coast, and to which we seemed very little nearer after crossing the Adriatic. The sailor who was left behind with us gave us no information whatever; he could speak nothing but an unintelligible Slav patois, and as Marco had poked fun at him while we were at sea, he refused to make any answer to our questions.

In the direction of the open sea we had simply a narrow vista or two, the *Halcyon* having selected for her disaster a spot which was hidden from view in every direction. The magnificent masses of submerged mountains which surrounded us formed a stage setting, superb in its very horror, and heart-rending in its desolation: not a blade of grass on the rock, no seaweed clinging to its sides, no reasonable hope of catching fish of any sort in that deep, limpid water, no chance of crossing the still angry waves without assistance from outside. In vain did we make the circuit of our prison again and again. From no point could we espy a hospitable shore, and we consulted our guide-books and charts to no purpose. In vain did we say to one another that the eastern shores of the Adriatic are strewn with inhabited islands; there was no trace of human life about us.

We were not as yet altogether alarmed by our plight. We must keep moving about in all directions, and we should soon see numbers of small vessels all about us; in any event the raft could not fail to fall in with some vessel before long and tell of our distress.

With the return of the sun the wind changed completely. It blew violently from the west, a disquieting circumstance in every respect. No fishing boat could put to sea, and no packet could possibly venture near the line of reefs. Would Moranbois be able to land anywhere without destroying his raft? We had loaded it with all the provisions it would hold. The quantity which remained was not very encouraging, and we deemed it prudent to postpone having recourse to it as long as possible. The tide, which has a very slight rise and fall in the Adriatic, began to rise in the basin, and Marco and I hoped that it would bring us some shellfish, with which we were determined to be content, in order not to touch the store-room.

We watched the waves closely, to prevent their carrying off again such treasures as they might bring to us. They brought nothing but empty shells. Impéria, who had recovered her self-possession, requested me to gather some of the prettiest ones for her. She took them from me, sorted them, and, sitting down on the rocks, took from her pocket her little needle-work satchel which never left her and began to make a necklace of those paltry baubles, as if she proposed to array herself in it at night and go to a ball. Pale and already emaciated by a single night of suffering and deathly mental agony, belabored by the wind, which did not play with her hair, but seemed determined to tear it from her head, she was nevertheless as sweet and serious as when I used to see her in the green-room at the Odéon, just convalescing from her illness and already at work on her lace, while she awaited the summons to her work upon the stage.

"I see that you are watching her," said Bellamare, who also was gazing at her; "that girl is certainly one rung above the rest of mankind; she is like an angel among the damned."

"Are you ill?" I said, looking at him in amazement; for he was so changed that I was terrified. He understood me, and answered with a smile:

"You are a no less frightful object than I; we are all frightful! We are completely exhausted. We must eat; otherwise we shall all be mad in ten minutes."

He was right. Lambesq was beginning to pick a quarrel with Marco, and Purpurin, half lying in the water, was reciting with a dazed air lines which had no meaning whatever.

We ran to the place where our provisions were; they were not damaged by the water, but, as they had been supplied by the master of the *Halcyon*, who speculated on everything, they were of wretched quality, except the wine, which was very good, and of which there was enough to last several days. The women were served first. Only one of them ate heartily; that was Régine, who drank as heartily; and as we had no drinkable water, the cask having burst in the wreck, she was soon drunk and fell asleep in a nook where she would have been washed away, if we had not carried her a little farther up the cliff.

Lambesq, who was already over-excited, also got drunk, and little Marco, who was usually abstemious, was speedily seized with a feverish sort of gayety. The others were more careful, and I put by a part of my ration, unnoticed by anyone. I was beginning to reflect that Morranbois, even if he were not swallowed up by the sea, or dashed to pieces on the shore, might not return for a long while, and I was determined to keep up Impéria's strength at the expense of my own, to the last moment.

No sail appeared during that day, which turned out foggy toward noon. The wind subsided and it grew warmer. We busied ourselves building a place of shelter for the women by breaking up the rock,

which was half-way between marble and chalk and offered little resistance. We dug out a sort of cave and built a low wall of dry stones. We made a bed for them all, with boxes and bales, and covered it with a piece of scenery which—bitter mockery of fate!—represented a glimpse of the sea between high cliffs. Another canvas, attached by ropes to the sides of real cliffs, formed a dressing-room and wardrobe for the ladies.

We next turned our attention to arranging a lookout at some point from which we could see beyond the outermost reefs. In vain did we watch the waves which beat against the doors of our prison; they brought no fragments of masts or yards from the wreck. The slender sticks upon which our scenery was rolled could not withstand the faintest kind of a breeze; despite the pains and skill we exerted in guying them, they were carried away in a few seconds, and we had to abandon the idea of hoisting a signal of distress.

Darkness came upon us before we had had time to think of making any sort of a shelter for ourselves. The wind began to blow again from the east, and was quite violent and very cold. Three or four times we had to replace and strengthen the women's tent, but they slept soundly none the less, with the exception of Anna, who had bad dreams and uttered a piercing shriek at intervals; the others, however, were too exhausted to pay any heed.

We had a few bits of wood left to feed the fire. Bellamare urged us to be very sparing in our use of them, and to keep them for the critical moment, when one of us might be seriously ill. We might be set free at any moment by some vessel; but it was no less evident that we might be imprisoned so long as the wind compelled passing vessels to keep out at sea, or the daily fog prevented our signals from being discovered.

The cold became so sharp toward morning that we were all attacked by chills and fever. We still had some provisions, but no one was hungry, and we tried to warm ourselves with the remains of the cask of Cyprus, which relieved us for an instant but soon increased our discomfort.

But we were only at the beginning of our trials. The following day brought torrents of rain, which rejoiced our hearts at first. We were able to quench our thirst and to lay in a small supply of fresh water in the few vessels we had; but we were frozen, and, when thirst was appeased hunger returned, more intense than ever. Bellamare, supported by Léon, Marco and myself, decreed that we must endure it as long as possible before attacking our last supplies.

That second day of vain suspense brought to all of us the first idea of the possibility of our being left to starve on that barren rock. The pangs of mental distress augmented our physical suffering. We were more disheartened than we had been at the moment of the wreck. Lambesq became absolutely unbearable with his useless complaints and absurd recriminations. The sailor who had remained with us, and

who was a veritable brute, was already suggesting by pantomime that we should draw lots to see which of us should be eaten.

That evening, the rain having ceased, we burned what little wood we still had, to revive Anna, who kept fainting every moment. Impéria, upon whom I had forced the provisions I had set aside, forced them upon her; what remained in the store-house disappeared during the night, consumed by Lambesq or the sailor, perhaps by both. All our reserve stock of fresh water took the same course or was allowed to run away.

During that third night the rain, which had soaked through our clothes, was succeeded by such piercing cold that we could not speak, our teeth chattered so. We emptied the chest containing the costumes and wrapped ourselves at random in whatever it contained in the way of jackets, dresses, cloaks and mantles. The women too were drenched, the rain had penetrated the canvas which served as their *velarium*, as well as the spongelike walls of the grotto we had fashioned for them. That infernal rock would not hold the water which we attempted to store in its hollows, nor did it protect us.

Someone suggested burning the chest which had contained our finery. Bellamare objected; it might be useful as a place of refuge for the last survivor.

The third morning brought with it the sun, at last, and with the disappearance of the fog came the hope of being discovered. Our blood became a little warmer, and we indulged in pleasant illusions. Anna recovered her strength in some degree; drunkenness continued to afford consolation to those who chose to have recourse to it. I could not prevent little Marco from taking more than he needed. He hated Lambesq, whose arrogance and selfishness exasperated him. We had much ado to prevent them from fighting in good earnest.

A sudden hope of rescue caused them to forget their quarrel; at last we sighted a vessel on the horizon! We made such signals as we could. Alas! she was too far away, and we were too small, too much hidden by the reefs! She passed! A second, a third, and, toward evening, two more, plunged us into delirious joy, followed by overwhelming despair. Anna fell asleep, and it was impossible for us to wake her in order to give her some shellfish we had succeeded in capturing. Lucinde covered her head with her shawl and sat as if turned to stone. Régine began to pray anew; on her face a livid pallor had replaced the purple flush of intoxication. We had to bind Purpurin to keep him from jumping into the sea, and to tranquillize the sailor with a sound thrashing, for he rushed at us with the purpose of drinking our blood.

Once more, thirst was the source of our torture. The Cyprus simply intensified it, and there were times when the animal instinct obtained the upper hand, and I had to entreat Bellamare and Léon, who were still masters of themselves, to prevent me from drinking myself to death.

Should we have suffered less if we had been without that wine,

which set our blood on fire and consumed our famished entrails? Perhaps so; but, on the other hand, perhaps the cold and dampness would have killed us before succor arrived.

The hut we had built for ourselves protected us hardly at all. The costume chest was large enough to hold one person in a crouching position. Lambesq had taken possession of it, and, safely ensconced in that place of refuge, hurled insults and threats at every one who came near, he was so afraid of being dispossessed. By dint of holding the lid down, at the risk of stifling himself, he succeeded in breaking it, whereat he cursed all the louder.

"That is as it should be," said Bellamare; "nothing helps a selfish man. You will do well to survive us, for, if any other of us is selected for that melancholy favor, he certainly will not deliver a eulogy over your body."

To avoid hearing Lambesq's sour reply, he led me a little aside and said to me:

"My dear boy, what we are suffering here is nothing, if we are destined to be rescued. I do not choose to doubt it, but I should lie if I said that I am certain of it, and, even if the prospects were brighter, I could not shake off the deep sorrow which I feel because of the more than probable death of Moranbois. This is the first time in my life that grief was ever stronger than my will. You are young; you have courage and energy. Léon is a dumb stoic, Marco an excellent boy, but too young for such a trial. You are the one, therefore, to supply me with courage if mine fails. Will you promise me to be the man and the head of an ill-fated family, if Bellamare's light goes out, either in death or in madness?"

"You are ingenious in everything," I replied, "even in your manner of giving one a lesson. I understand. A little while ago I weakened, and you have discovered the best way to restore my courage is by pretending to give way yourself. Thanks, my friend; I will try, down to the last moment, to be worthy to second you."

He embraced me, and I felt tears on the cheeks of that man whom I had always seen with a smile on his face.

"Let me cry like an idiot," he rejoined with his usual smile, which was truly heartrending. "Moranbois will have no other farewell than these tears of a friend who perhaps will soon have vanished as completely as he. That rough-hewn comrade of my wandering life was devotion personified. He is certain to have died as he should have died! Let us, too, try to die nobly, my boy, if we are fated to remain on this reef, which serves simply to prolong our death-agony. It would have been an easy death to go down with the ship. To succumb to hunger and cold is longer and more painful. Come, let us be men! Let us let the wine alone, for it excites and weakens us, I am sure. I have read many narratives of shipwrecks and of men who have committed suicide from inanition. I know that the pangs of hunger cease after three or four days. We have suffered that length of time; in two

or three days more, thirst also will have disappeared, and those of us who have strong constitutions may live a few days without going mad and without suffering. Let us take measures to sustain those who are weakest, especially the women, by preaching hope and patience. Anna is the most nervous; she will hold out the best. The bravest of them all is Impéria, and she worries me the most, because she forgets herself for the others, and does not dream of taking any care of herself. I must tell you that I have about me a hidden treasure which I am keeping for her: a box of dates—a very small one, alas!—and a small bottle of fresh water. We must not wait for the first symptom of weakness from her, for with such natures, which give way only to die, belated succor is of no use. Go to her and tell her that I want her, and, when we have her here, we will compel her to eat and drink.”

I obeyed at once, without telling Impéria what was wanted. We led her to the point of the little island, and there Bellamare said to her:

“You will do what I say, my child, or I give you my word of honor that I will jump into the sea. I don’t propose to see you starve to death.”

“I am not hungry,” she replied, “I am not suffering at all; I am the one who will jump into the sea if you two do not eat what you have left.”

She obstinately refused, swearing that she was strong and could still wait a long while. As she said this with much animation, she suddenly fainted. A few drops of water revived her, and when she was better we forced her, by an almost brutal exercise of authority, to eat a few dates.

“Won’t you please eat too?” she asked in a tone of entreaty.

“Remember your father,” said I; “you are not at liberty to throw away your life.”

On the following day, which was the fourth, the weather was still superb and we warmed ourselves in the sun. Weakness was beginning to overcome all of us; we were calm, for the wine was all gone. Lambesq and the sailor slept soundly at last. Purpurin had lost his memory and no longer recited verses. Bellamare, Léon and I entered the little recess set apart for the women. Impéria had succeeded in enlivening them by her unalterable patience. She sustained her comrades as Bellamare did his.

“Stay with us,” she said; “we are no longer sick or ill-tempered, you see! we have dressed, and arranged our hair, we have put our salon to rights and we are ready to receive our friends. It seems impossible that help will not come to-day, it is so beautiful. Régine, who has turned saint in her fear of death, imagines that she is fasting voluntarily, to atone for the sins of her past. Lucinde has found her mirror, which was lost when we came ashore, and is convinced that pallor is very becoming to her. Indeed, she has determined to whiten her paint when she next goes on the stage. Our little Anna is cured, and

we have planned to chat together, as if we were sitting through an entr'acte, and to forget that we are not here for our pleasure."

"Mesdames," replied Bellamare with the utmost gravity, "we accept your gracious invitation, but only on condition that your programme is seriously carried out. I propose that we exact a forfeit from anyone who mentions the sea, the wind, the rocks, or thirst or hunger, or, in short, anything to remind us of the unpleasant accident which detains us here."

"Agreed!" they all cried.

And they asked Léon to recite some of his own verses.

"No," said he, "my verses are always sad. I have considered my life a shipwreck, and we mustn't speak of shipwrecks here. It would be in the worst possible taste, as we have agreed."

"Very well," rejoined Bellamare, "we will have a little music. The box of instruments is here in your apartment, mesdames; you are using it for a bed if I am not mistaken; let us open it and let each of us do what he can."

He gave me the violin and took the bass viol himself; Marco took possession of the cymbals and Léon of the flute. We were all musicians to some extent, for, in places where the people did not understand French we used to give comic opera after a fashion, and, when the orchestra was short of performers, one of us would lead the amateurs and at the same time do his part.

The effect of our concert was to make us all burst into tears. There was a general relaxation of the nerves. Purpurin, attracted by the music, embraced his master's knees, saying that he would go to the end of the world with him.

"To the end of the world!" replied Bellamare, mournfully; "it seems to me that we are there already to all intent."

"A forfeit!" cried Impéria, "we will have no allusions here. As Purpurin has well said, we will all go to the end of the world and come back again."

Thereupon she began to sing and dance, taking us by the hand one after another; and we followed her example, forgetful of everything and not noticing the weakness of our legs; but, a few moments later, we were all lying on the ground fast asleep.

I woke first. Impéria was beside me. I seized her in my arms and kissed her passionately, unconscious of what I was doing.

"What's the matter?" she exclaimed in terror; "what is happening to us now?"

"Nothing," said I, "except that I feel that I am dying, and I do not choose to die without telling you the truth. I adore you; it was on your account that I became an actor. You are everything to me, and I shall love no one but you for all eternity."

I do not know what else I said to her, for I was delirious. It seems to me that I talked a long while and in a loud voice, which woke none of the others. Bella mare, dressed as Crispin, lay inert and motionless

beside us; Léon, in a Russian costume, had his head on Marco's knees, the latter being enveloped in a Roman toga. I gazed stupidly at them.

"See," I said to Impéria, "the play is at an end, all the characters are dead. It was a burlesque; we too are going to die, both of us; that is why I tell you the secret, the great secret of my rôle and my life. I love you, I love you madly, I love you to the death, and I am dying of my love."

She made no reply, but wept. I became utterly mad.

"This must come to an end," I said with a fiendish laugh.

And I tried to throw her into the sea; but I lost consciousness, and I have only the vaguest remembrance of the two days that followed. There was neither merriment, nor anger, nor melancholy; we were all numb and indifferent. The sea washed ashore some wreckage covered with miserable shell-fish, which kept us from starvation, and which we gathered with astounding indolence, we were so sure of dying ourselves in spite of them. A few drops of rain fell and barely lessened our thirst; some of our number even refused to make the most of that feeble alleviation, which reawoke the sleeping desire to live. I hardly remember my feelings, and I can recall only a constant recurrence of my fixed idea. Impéria was always in my dreams, for I was in a comatose state all the time. When Bellamare, who still held out against the tendency to give way, would come and shake me, I could not distinguish between the imaginary and the real, and, thinking that he was calling me for the performance, I would ask him for my cue; or else I would fancy that I was in the famous blue chamber with him, and would lower my voice. I believe that I told Impéria again of my love, and that she did not understand me. She was making lace, or fancied that she was, for her stiff fingers, so wasted that they were transparent, often went through the motions in the empty air. One morning, I don't know which one, I was conscious that some very strong person lifted me up and carried me as if I were a child. I opened my eyes and saw near mine a sunburned face which I kissed without knowing why, for I did not recognize it: it was the face of Moranbois.

We had been seven nights and six days on the reef, between life and death. I will not tell you from my own recollection what happened to me, for I was completely dazed and practically an idiot for another week. Most of my companions suffered the same consequence of our hardships; but I can tell you what happened, as I learned it from Bellamare and Moranbois when I recovered my health and my mind.

During the last night of our martyrdom on the *accursed reef*, Bellamare was rudely awakened by the sailor's trying to strangle him in order to eat him. He defended himself, and the result of the struggle was that his adversary took a plunge into the sea. He did not appear again and no one mourned for him; Lambesq alone expressed some



regret because Bellamare, having killed the wretch in lawful self-defence, had given his remains to the fishes. Lambesq was in no wise appalled by the possibility of having to eat a fellow-man, however unappetizing he might be; and if he had felt strong enough, I don't know to what extremities he might have gone against us.

But Moranbois's expedition is what you are more interested to hear about. This is what happened to him from the moment he embarked on the raft.

He had no sooner got clear of the breakers which beat so fiercely on the reefs, than he found that he was carried seaward by an extraordinarily powerful and altogether inexplicable current. The master of the *Halcyon* did not understand it, and said that such a thing had not been known in the Adriatic within the memory of man. On reaching the shore where, after twenty hours of a desperate battle with the sea, he landed alone, being tossed on the rocks with the débris of the raft and the corpses of his two companions, our friend realized what had happened. An earthquake, which we had not noticed at the moment of our disaster, had spread dismay along the coast of Dalmatia, and, having presumably changed the configuration under water of the reefs upon which we had come to grief, had produced a sort of tide-race which lasted several days.

Moranbois himself was wrecked on a little island inhabited by a number of fishermen, in the neighborhood of Ragusa. He was rescued by them half-dead. Not until several hours had passed was he able to explain his plight by pantomime, for they could not understand a word of French or Italian. All that he could prevail upon them to do was to take him to another island, where he found the same difficulty in making himself understood and the same obstacles to reaching the mainland. You know that that country has been laid waste heretofore by violent earthquakes, one of which utterly destroyed the splendid city of Ragusa, the second Venice as it was then called. Moranbois found the people on the coast much more terrified on their own account than inclined to go to the help of others. He dragged himself as far as Gravosa, which is a suburb of Ragusa and its sea-port; and there, giving way at last to exhaustion, grief and anger, he was so ill that he was taken to the hospital, where he believed that he was destined to die without rescuing us. His story seemed most improbable, and they talked of imprisoning him. You can readily imagine that his language, which was ordinarily anything but parliamentary, assumed under such circumstances a vigor which did not prejudice people in his favor. He was suspected of trying to lure a vessel away from port on a fruitless search for imaginary castaways, in order to betray her to pirates. It was even suggested that he should be prosecuted for murdering the captain of the *Halcyon*. At last, when he had succeeded in demonstrating his sincerity, and the weather was calm, he succeeded in hiring at an exorbitant price a tartan the crew of which laughed at him and took him hither and thither at random,

refusing to hasten or to sail near the very reefs which he particularly desired to visit. They stood off and on for a long while before he could identify the place where we were; and he was obliged to go in with a small skiff which he had insisted on bringing.

All this will explain to you why he failed to reach us until we had abandoned all hope and all inclination to struggle. I must except Bel-lamare, whose clearly defined recollections proved that he had not ceased for an instant to watch over us and to realize our situation.

The tartan took us to Ragusa, and not until we had been there several days did I recover memory of the past and consciousness of the present. We had all been very ill, but I, with my long body, robust and youthful, and consequently very exacting in the matter of food, had had a harder time than the others. Moranbois had recovered in two days; Anna was still so weak that she had to be carried; Lambesq was better off than any of us physically, but his mental faculties were seriously impaired, and he continued to think that he was on the reef, and to groan and lament in a dazed fashion. Lucinde swore that she would never leave the solid earth again, and, standing persistently in front of her mirror, worried about the length of her nose, which was made more noticeable by the hollowness of her cheeks. Régine, on the contrary, was not sorry to have grown thinner and could still make amusing remarks, above all, of a cynical turn; she had made progress in that respect. Léon had retained all his sound judgment, but his liver troubled him, and, although he did not complain, he seemed more misanthropic than ever. Marco, meanwhile, was more serious and affectionate, speaking only of the others and forgetful of himself. Purpurin had become almost dumb as a result of his dazed condition, and Moranbois hoped that he would remain so.

As for Impéria, who interested me more than all the others, she was mysterious in suffering as in everything; she had suffered less physically than her companions, thanks to the little nourishment Bel-lamare and I had forced her to accept; but her mind seemed to have undergone a peculiar upheaval. She had been less ill, but the effect lasted longer, and she could not endure any mention of our past trials.

"She was sublime to the very last," said Bellamare, when I expressed my surprise to him; "she thought only of us, not of herself at all. Now there is a reaction, she is paying for her excessive devotion, and she bears us a grudge for causing her too much fatigue and anxiety. She is as exacting and irritable with us now that we are convalescent, as she was gentle and patient when we were at death's door; she doesn't realize what she is doing. Let us act as if we didn't notice it. In a few days her equilibrium will be restored. Dame Nature is an unrelenting sovereign; self-sacrifice subdues her, but she resumes her privileges when that wonderful stimulant has no cause for activity."

Impéria did in fact recover her equilibrium in a few days, except with me. She seemed distrustful of me, she was even captious and sneering at times. She would change her tone when she saw that I was

surprised and distressed, but the friendship and unconstraint of the earlier days had vanished. What had happened during my days of delirium? I could recall only what I have told you. That was quite enough to put her on her guard against me; but had she understood it? could she remember it? could she fail to attribute my excitement to the fever which was then consuming me? I dared not question her, just because I feared that I might remind her of something she had forgotten. I feigned indifference too at the beginning. I was too weak to think of being in love, and I liked to persuade myself that I had never been. It is certain that we were all strangely lifeless and calm. When we were all together for the first time, on the terrace of a small villa which we had hired on the wooded hill overlooking the harbor, it was not the thinness and pallor of our faces which impressed me most—they were already less ghastly than they had been on the reef; it was an expression common to all, which produced a sort of family resemblance between the most dissimilar features. Our eyes were wide open and staring, as if terrified, and, by a contrast painful to see, a dazed smile played about our quivering lips. All of us had a sort of stutter, and were more or less deaf. Some felt these effects for a long time.

Bellamare, who had not taken a moment's rest, watching over us all, overlooking the prescriptions of the local physicians, who did not inspire confidence, and doctoring us himself with the remedies contained in his portable pharmacy, began to show the effects of fatigue the moment that ours began to disappear. We had been for a fortnight in that little sea-port, on a beautiful coast, with a view of the lovely bluish gray mountains which encircle it, and not one of us was yet in condition to work or to travel. Since Ancona, that is to say for nearly a month, we had earned nothing, and we had spent a great deal, Bellamare having determined to spare no efforts to hasten our recovery. Our financial situation became worse every day, and every day Moranbois's brow grew darker; but he did not choose to say anything, fearing that Bellamare would attempt to give performances at Ragusa, and would subject himself prematurely to fresh fatigue and worry. Was there a theatre at Ragusa? We had saved our canvas backgrounds and Léon set about repainting them, while Marco and I passed our leisure moments in gluing paper over the back of them to cover up the holes. I was not at all worried, for my part I still had my little fortune in paper in my belt, and I looked upon that money as the certain salvation of the manager and the troupe when the cash-box should be altogether empty.

But their salvation was not destined to come from me as yet. One evening as we were taking our supper in the orchard under the flowering lemon-trees, we received a visit from the owner of the villa, who was the owner, also, of the tartan Moranbois had hired to come in search of us. He had received no pay for either.

"Rabelais's quarter of an hour has come," said Bellamare to us

with a glance at Moranbois, who was cursing between his teeth.

"Never fear," said I, "I am still in funds; let us receive our creditor courteously."

Thereupon we saw a tall young man, belted in at the waist like a wasp, glistening with gold and purple, as handsome in face as an antique statue, and instinct with majestic grace in his gorgeous Grecian military costume.

"Which of you is the manager of the company, gentlemen?" he said in good French, with a courteous salutation.

"I am," replied Bellamare, "and I have to thank you for the confidence with which the custodian of this villa authorized me, in your name, to take up my residence here with my poor shipwrecked comrades, who are still far from well, without asking me for payment in advance; but we are prepared—"

"I did not come here for that," replied the gorgeous personage. "I do not let this house, I lend it; nor do I ask shipwrecked travellers to pay for the help which every man owes to his fellows."

"But, monsieur—"

"Say no more about it; it would be insulting to me. I am Prince Klementi, a rich man in my country, although I should be a poor man in yours, where men have other needs, other habits, but at the same time other burdens. Everything is relative. I was educated in France at College Henri IV. So I am somewhat civilized and something of a Frenchman; my mother was a Parisian. I love the theatre, of which I have been deprived for a long while, and I look upon actors as persons of wit and learning who are most essential to our progress. My visit has no other object than to take you with me to pass the spring among our mountains, where you will all speedily recover your health in the salubrious air, among excellent people who will be charmed by your talent, and who, like myself, will consider themselves your debtors when you are kind enough to display it to them."

Bellamare, tempted by this courteous invitation, consulted us with a glance, and, seeing that his inclination was generally approved, promised to place himself at the prince's disposal for a few days only, as soon as we should be in condition to act and sing.

"No, no," replied the comely Klementi, "I don't choose to wait. I propose to take you with me, to make you comfortable, and give you as much time to rest as you need. You shall not act until it is quite agreeable to you, and not at all if you think best. I still look upon you simply as castaways in whom I am deeply interested, and whom I propose to have for my friends pending the time when they shall be my actors."

Léon, who did not approve of patrons, objected that we were due at Constantinople, and that we were under contract.

"With whom?" cried the prince; "with Monsieur Zamorini?"

"Precisely."

"Zamorini is a blackguard, who will make all he can out of you,

and leave you penniless on the streets of Constantinople. Only last year I found at Bucharest an Italian woman he had taken there as prima donna, and had abandoned in that city, where she was earning her living as a servant in a tartan; but for me she would be there still. To-day she is singing at Trieste, with success. She is a most excellent young woman, who has retained a warm friendship for me, and to whom I restored her independence after asking her to give me a few lessons in singing. I will ask you simply to talk with me from time to time, to keep me from getting rusty and to perfect my French, which I am fearful of forgetting. When you are all restored to health, you shall resume your flight if you insist upon it; and if you are bent upon visiting our enemies the Turks, I will make the journey easier for you; but I shall be greatly surprised if Zamorini is not bankrupt before then. He had a very beautiful wife, who re-established his business when he was very badly off. But she finally tired of being exploited by that villain and left him, in order to exploit on her own account a Russian from the Black Sea, who took her away with him three months ago."

The handsome prince continued to talk with the facility of speech peculiar to the Slav; for he was not an Albanian, as the similarity of his costume to that of that nation had led us to believe. He claimed to be a Montenegrin, but he was a Herzegovinian or Bosnian by descent. Strangely enough his paternal ancestors, whose portraits we soon saw at his home, were of the large-framed, bony Hungarian type, and he owed his beautiful Greek features to his mother, who, as we learned subsequently, was a milliner on Rue Vivienne, and no more of a Greek than you or I. That expansive and, to all appearance, perfectly amiable individual, fascinated almost all of us, and as he assured us that his principality was but a day's journey from Ragusa, we yielded to his expressed desire to take us thither on the following day.

As the harbor of Gravosa runs very far inland, we embarked with all our belongings on the tartan which had brought us thither, and of which the prince did the honors with easy grace. He apparently had no suspicion that the interior might have been neater, and that detail gave us food for thought concerning the habits of his countrymen. However, the craft in question, which the prince rarely used, and which was engaged in freighting for his account the rest of the time, did not lack some pretensions to splendor when His Highness was on board. It was covered with a multicolored awning, and was fitted with a sort of *roof* with scalloped edges, and decorated in the style of the fairy palaces of our boulevards. It is true that the decoration seemed to have been entrusted to the hands of a decorator from Carpentras.

We landed and drove to Ragusa, where a breakfast awaited us, and where we were permitted to visit the palace of the doges before reëntering our hired carriages. At last we started toward the mountains, along a beautiful, well-shaded road, which ascended gently, and

which offered a lovely view at every turn. We had become light-hearted and heedless once more, ready to accept everything. We were in our element travelling on terra firma, and our trials faded away like a dream.

But, after a short drive, the road came to an end; we were confronted by a horrible perpendicular path. The carriages were paid for and dismissed. The boxes and scenery were entrusted to porters who would carry them to their destination on their backs in two days. Mules, led by women clad in picturesque rags, awaited us at the top of the mountain, which we must climb on foot. I was very glad to do it for my own part; feeling that my legs, instead of refusing to do their work, became firmer with every step; but I dreaded on Bellamare's account and Impéria's the consequences of a journey which did not give promise of being strewn with flowers.

It was in fact exceedingly toilsome. In the first place, our women were frightened when they found themselves perched upon mules climbing or descending dizzy paths, and entrusted to the tender mercies of other women who kept up a constant chattering and laughing, barely touching the bridles of their charges, and heedlessly allowing them to walk on the very edge of the precipices. Little by little, however, the actresses acquired confidence in those strong mountaineers, who perform all the rough labor, which the men, whose sole occupation is war, are excused from; but the fatigue was overpowering, for we had to travel ten leagues or more in this fashion, almost always leaning forward or backward on our steeds, and having only brief intervals for breathing on the level spots. Léon, Marco and I preferred to walk, but we had to walk very fast. The prince, mounted on an excellent horse, which he managed with dazzling grace and dexterity, rode at the head of the line, with two long-moustached retainers trotting on foot behind him, with carbines over their shoulders, and belts well supplied with cutlasses and pistols. The women, proud of their strength and courage, made it a point of honor to follow them at a short distance. We walked behind, bothered and embarrassed by our mules and horses, who did not require to be dragged along by a bridle—they were full of zeal and the spirit of emulation—but tried constantly to go before us, and sent avalanches of stones about our legs. Lambesq became furiously angry with his mule, and the animal, trying to dodge his blows, lost his head and fell over the precipice. The prince and his escort did not pay the slightest heed. We must get out of the pass before dark, we were dying of thirst, and the calcareous rock by which we were surrounded had not a drop of water to offer us.

At last, just at twilight, we found ourselves on the turf of a narrow valley overhung on all sides by barren peaks. A large house, surmounted by a cupola, and brightly lighted, stood on a hillside a short distance away. It had the appearance of an enormous convent. It was in fact a convent. Our prince had the rank of a bishop, although a

layman, and that ancient monastery, where his uncles had reigned as princes, had become his episcopal residence.

I will not attempt to explain to you the abnormal features of the social system of a Christian province which is supposed to belong to Turkey, but, being always at war with its oppressors, really obeys and belongs to itself alone. We were on the boundary between Herzegovina and Montenegro. I understood almost nothing of the strange and illogical things—strange and illogical according to our ideas—which I saw there. It may be that I viewed them with the heedlessness of the Frenchman and the indifference of the artist who travels for the purpose of letting his mind roam among novel things without seeking to fathom the why and the how. To actors everything is a play; to strolling actors everything is a surprise and diversion. If the actor steeped himself, like a philosopher, in another's ideas, things would no longer impress him as he needs to be impressed.

My comrades were like me in that respect. To us nothing seemed more natural than to have a convent for a palace and a Montenegrin warrior for abbot.

We expected however to see a long procession of monks appear from beneath those vaulted arches. There was only a single monk, who had charge of the dispensary and the kitchen. The rest of the Greek community had been transferred to another convent which the prince had had built at a short distance from the older one. As the latter was crumbling to decay, he had repaired and fortified it. So that it was now a citadel as well, and a dozen or more skulls, which adorned the top of one of the entrance turrets, bore witness to the clodhopper sovereign's summary method of administering justice. To cut off heads with true Oriental *chic* while discussing the charms of Déjazet, to fight like one of Homer's heroes while imitating Grassot—these contrasts summarize in two words the indescribable existence of Prince Klementi.

He had vassals like a baron of the Middle Ages, and those fighting vassals were his masters rather than his dependents. He was a fervent Christian, and he had a harem of veiled women whom no one ever saw. As, in conjunction with the mixture of manners and customs characteristic of the frontier provinces, he had the peculiarity of being a Frenchman through his mother and by virtue of his years at the Parisian lycée, he was the most abnormal being whom I have ever met; and I must tell you that, except for his comparative wealth and his approved patriotism, he would not probably have been accepted by his neighbors, who were far more dramatic in their intense earnestness—the always rebellious chieftains of Montenegro and Bosnia.

His subjects, to the number of about twelve hundred, were of all races, having Mirdish, Bosnian, Croatian, Venetian, Servian and Russian ancestors; there may have been Auvergnats among them for aught I know. They were of all religions, Jews, Armenians, Copts, Russians, Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics; there was a goodly

number of Mussulmans among them too, and they were not the least devoted to the cause of national independence. The prince also possessed a village, that is to say an encampment of idolatrous gypsies who were said to sacrifice rats and owls to an unknown god.

We were all quartered in two rooms, rooms of such enormous size, however, that we could have given a circus performance in them. Oriental hangings, somewhat faded but still very rich, divided the women's chamber into several compartments, so that each one could have her own domicile. The men's apartment was divided by a huge screen of aloes into two equal parts, one to sleep in, the other to walk in. There were couches and divans in abundance by way of beds, but no more sheets and coverlets than I found in the blue chamber.

The prince disappeared after bidding us good-night, and the monk-cook brought us coffee and rose preserve. We supposed that that was a customary refection before meals, and awaited a supper which did not appear. So we attacked the preserves, and, as we were very tired, contented ourselves with them, hoping to be compensated by the next day's breakfast.

At daybreak, feeling in excellent condition in spite of everything, I went out with Léon to take a look at the landscape. It was a beautiful spot, an oasis of verdure in a frame of imposing cliffs crowned by peaks still covered with snow. Through a notch of peculiar shape I recognized, or fancied that I did, the sharp pink-hued Alps which we had had plenty of time to admire during our confinement on the reef.

The valley overlooked by the manor-house was not two kilometres long; it was an oblong plain, which we walked rapidly across in order to see what lay beyond. That beautiful grassy tract, bordered by almond trees in flower, seemed to be closed to all egress by a perpendicular wall of chalk. But we had noticed during our journey the day before, that the numberless valleys confined in that extraordinary network of mountains communicated with one another by narrow passes, and by a little climbing we were able to make our way into another valley more extensive than the first, and well tilled, which formed the better part of the prince's domain. A fascinating little lake received the water from a sort of grotto in the hillside, but we could not discover where the said water left the lake. Léon explained to me that it was a *ponor*, that is to say one of the many underground streams which alternately display and conceal their mysterious courses in that inaccessible region, unknown as yet to the geographer.

That water was the source of Prince Klementi's wealth, for drought is the scourge of those countries, as well as the safeguard of their independence. There are, so I have been told, vast tracts of country, veritable deserts, where an enemy's troops cannot keep the field for lack of water.

On returning from our walk we found our actresses making a collection of soup-tureens and pails in the kitchen. It had not occurred to our host that Christians could possibly desire to perform ablutions,



and the bowls and other toilet articles of English porcelain which adorned the pantry were used to hold game pies.

Bellamare meanwhile was making a demand upon the monk-cook for a breakfast more substantial than the supper of the night before. That official apologized with obsequious politeness, saying that breakfast would be served at noon and that he had had no orders to serve it earlier. Once more we took patience and coffee. Brother Ischirion, the bearded cook, in black frock and judge's cap, had other things to do than to listen to our complaints. He was a sort of Master Jacques, who was engaged at that moment in polishing weapons and spurs. As he could speak Italian, he informed us that the prince had started very early to arrange for a review of his army, which would take place on the greensward at ten o'clock. He added that his highness probably desired to offer that entertainment to our illustrious excellencies. We could believe it if we chose, but in reality the prince had a more serious purpose.

Our womankind, being advised of the solemn function in prospect, arrayed themselves as gorgeously as they could. Their parade costumes had suffered some serious damage on the *infernal reef*; but, with the taste and skill of Frenchwomen and artists, they speedily repaired the damage, and were able to appear in toilets which did us credit. They did us the favor of sewing on many buttons which were missing from our coats, and of ironing more than one outrageously demoralized collar. When ten o'clock arrived we were fairly presentable, and the prince, having caused his visit to be announced, appeared before us in all the splendor of his military costume, the white leggings embellished with red and gold lace of beautiful workmanship, the snow-white kilt over breeches of scarlet cashmere, the red broadcloth cloak, studded with glistening buttons and embroidery, with silken sleeves trimmed with gold and silver lace, the cap of astrakhan and velvet surmounted by an *aigrette*, held in place by a clasp of precious stones, the solid gold girdle, supplied with a whole arsenal of yataghans and pistols with hilts of birds' and serpents' heads. He was so handsome, that he seemed to have come forth from the enchanted casket of some genie of the *Thousand and One Nights*. He escorted us to the platform of the turret at the entrance, where the severed heads, which our women had not previously noticed, filled them with horror and disgust. Impéria, to whom the prince had offered his arm and who stepped first upon the platform, stifled a shriek, and, leaving her escort without ceremony, rushed back to the spiral staircase, saying to her companions who were following her:

"Not there! don't go there! it's perfectly ghastly!"

A woman's fear is always attended by eager curiosity. Although terribly frightened beforehand, Anna, Lucinde and Régine wished to see for themselves, and came back to us shrieking like madwomen. The prince laughed with the ends of his lips, a little surprised and a little offended; but he could not induce them to remain in a place so

impregnated with local color. In vain did he argue that Turks' heads were not human heads, and that they were dried by the wind, consequently very clean; they declared that they would forego the pleasure of seeing the review rather than see it in such company. Klementi took us to another tower; he was somewhat annoyed, for he was compelled to change the programme of his spectacle, I should say his plans for the review. He left us there, and we soon saw him on the drawbridge, prancing and caracoling on a magnificent mountain horse, who breathed flame through every pore, and seemed desirous to swallow all the others.

It was a very imposing spectacle. The army consisted of two hundred and fifty men—but such men! They were all tall and spare, graceful, well uniformed, armed to the teeth, and admirable horsemen. Their small horses, as shaggy and wiry as Cossack horses, fairly devoured the earth. They executed several very skilfully devised figures, especially an imitation of a cavalry charge, descending and ascending the steep hillside at the same fast gallop, leaping vast ditches, and ending by a hair-raising steeplechase in perfect order. Then there was an ambuscade and a little battle among the rocks opposite us. The horsemen crowded together upon narrow shelves of rock with their horses, which they guided with one hand while they discharged their muskets with the other; then they practised firing at full gallop at Turks' heads—sham ones, they were.

The prince took part in all these exercises and displayed therein an address combined with perfect grace which added fresh lustre to his striking beauty. Lastly a Homeric feast brought all the warriors together on the sward. Twenty whole sheep were served. Officers and troopers sat on the grass, without distinction of rank, and ate with their fingers, with great gravity and neatness, without spotting their fine uniforms.

The fumes of the roast meat reminded us that we had hardly broken our fast since leaving Ragusa, and although no one seemed to think of us, we invited ourselves, and went down from our post of observation with the determination of people who had no desire to renew the fasting of the infernal reef.

The prince, who presided at the banquet, was just proposing a *toast*, which degenerated into a *speech*. We walked straight to Brother Ischirion, who was performing his duties in the open air, and Bel-lamare took possession of a stew pan which was bubbling on the stove, and contained half of a sheep with rice. The monk attempted to prevent him.

“Do you want me to brain you?” said Moranbois, fixing his hawk-like glance upon him.

The poor wretch understood that glance, if not the words of the threat, sighed and let us alone.

Taking refuge in a clump of lentisks, where we were completely hidden, we feasted royally, each of us sallying forth in turn to take

possession openly of a piece of game, or a fish from the lake in the next valley. The prince noticed our manoeuvring, and, laying aside for a moment the cares of his empire, he stole in among us, apologizing for his failure to invite us to that purely military feast, because it was not customary to admit strangers to it, and because, furthermore, the women never ate with the men.

“Monseigneur,” replied Bellamare, “we are all Auvergnats, neither men nor women, therefore we are all equal. Your warriors of the *Iliad* are free to take us for gypsies; but we were hungry and we cannot live on preserved fruits. Either give us meat to eat or send us away; for, with the delicate diet to which your minister of culinary affairs seems disposed to confine us, we shall never be capable of repeating three lines for you.”

The prince condescended to smile and to promise us that on the morrow we should be treated in true European fashion.

“You must leave me this day,” he added, “as it is to be devoted to some matters of great gravity. To-morrow I shall be entirely at your service.”

“As that is the case,” said Moranbois, as soon as he had taken his leave, “let us fill our pockets for the rest of the day.”

And he stuffed several roast partridges into his capacious travelling bag.

We passed the rest of the day on the shore of the little lake which Léon and I had discovered in the morning. It was a truly delightful spot. In the centre the water was as clear as crystal; where the subterranean stream which fed it emptied into it, it flowed noisily among rocks covered with rose-laurel and myrtle in flower. We felt completely restored to health in that oasis, and we indulged in outbreaks of wild merriment of a sort to which we had long been strangers; even Moranbois and Léon unbent; and Purpurin tried to make poetry.

We were favored with the end of the morning’s spectacle when the horsemen who had given us the *fantasia* appeared on the road which crossed the plain and rode away in groups, disappearing at various points in the mountains by paths which we were quite unable to detect. At intervals one or another of the groups would reappear on some dizzy height. The gold on their uniforms and their beautiful weapons glistened in the rays of the setting sun.

“I have never been to the Opera,” observed Purpurin, with a judicial air, “but I consider this even finer.”

We should have remained there, forgetful of everything, until dark, had it not been for a tall old fellow with long white moustaches, arms bare to the shoulder, and an immeasurably long musket by way of crook, who passed with a flock of sheep, stopped and saluted us with a grave but affable air, and delivered a discourse which none of us understood; but as he persistently pointed first to the sun and then to the monastery, we divined that, for some reason or other, we ought to return. It was well for us that we did, for they were about to raise

the drawbridge when we appeared. The little fortress was hermetically closed as soon as the sun sank behind the lowest of the mountains. We were not alarmed at the prospect of being imprisoned thus every night: not one of us foresaw that it might become very unpleasant for us.

As Brother Ischirion was the only retainer with whom we could converse, we tried to make him talk when he brought us the excellent Turkish coffee and the everlasting preserves which, in his opinion, should be sufficient for us after our noon repast. He informed us that the prince had detained the principal officers of his army, and was taking counsel with them in what used to be the chapter hall.

"God knows," he added in an emphatic and heartfelt tone, "whether sunbeam or thunderclap will be the result of that conference! whether peace or war!"

"War with the Turks?" queried Bellamare. "Do these gentry ever attack you?"

"Every year," replied the monk, "and the favorable season for taking some fort or mountain pass will soon be here. God grant that they may not try it within two months, for then our lake will be dry. The fine fish which live in it will have returned with it to the bowels of the earth, and the enemy, finding nothing to eat or drink in the province, will not venture so far into the heart of the mountains as this."

"What do you live on during the summer, pray?" asked Régine.

"In summer," replied the monk, "our gracious master, Prince Klementi, goes to Trieste or Venice. We drink sour milk and eat cheese fried in butter, like the other inhabitants of the plain."

"It isn't a fattening diet," replied Régine, "for one can see the light through your cheeks."

"It seems," said Bellamare, when the monk had gone, "that our host desires to be amused down to the moment that he takes the field. It was a strange idea of his to bring us here in the midst of such pre-occupations, unless he kidnapped us in order to force us to join his army, which is more remarkable for its fine appearance than its size. Tell me, my children, wouldn't it amuse you to carry a musket against the heathen?"

"No, indeed!" cried Lambesq. "That would be the last straw! We must have fallen into a nice wasps' nest!"

"For my part," said Moranbois, who like all the rest of us enjoyed worrying Lambesq, "I should not be sorry to train a gun over these little ramparts and blow out the brains of a Mussulman or two."

"In that case, rejoice," said Léon, continuing the jest. "I know that it is the prince's purpose to entrust the care of his fortress to us when he takes the field, and the chances are ten to one that we shall have to stand an assault."

"I do not object to the prospect," cried Marco; "I have always dreamed of acting melodrama *au naturel*."

Lambesq's wrath and terror restored our good-humor, and we

proposed to pass the evening merrily; but, first of all, we desired to know if we were really at home, and if we could make a noise without disturbing our host and interfering with the solemnity of his council of war.

Bellamare, Léon, Marco, Impéria, Lucinde and myself—I walking first with a torch—determined to make a voyage of discovery in that romantic monastery, which we had not as yet had time to explore. Our chambers opened on a bastion which was overlooked by another crenelated structure, where a sentinel paced back and forth day and night. We enjoyed a lovely moonlight effect, the white beams cutting the sharp outlines of the fortifications; but there was something intrusive and irritating in the presence of that sentinel and his regular step. The scene was not enlivening, and the night air was cold. We decided to seek elsewhere a favorable spot for our amusements or for the delights of a general *far niente*, something which would remind us of the greenroom of a large theatre. Through long vaulted and surbased cloisters, up and down mysterious stairways which led sometimes only to walled-up doors or to piles of rubbish—for certain portions of the interior of the monastery were still in ruins—we came at last to the library, which was very beautiful but entirely despoiled of its venerable books, which, as well as the printing-press, had been taken to the new convent. In one of the closets only did we find a few odd volumes of Eugene Sue and Balzac, with Beranger's *Chansons* and a volume given as a prize to Klementi at College Henri IV. A Turkish guitar without strings—I should say its string, for the *guzla* has only one—several long muskets which had seen their best days, old divans scattered about at random, stools on which to stand to reach the empty shelves, hangings rolled up, crippled tables, in a word, a thousand useless or cast-off things in dust-laden confusion, bore witness to the absolute neglect of that apartment, which was as large as a church and well-lighted by long arched windows; but the moon cast sepulchral rays on the tiled floor. It would have required the brilliant illumination of a theatre to enliven that desert. The women swore that they would die of fright there, and that we must find something else.

"Wait!" said Lucinde, "there are a lot of wax candles on a shelf up there, with which we can illuminate. Try and climb up to them, messieurs."

We helped Marco to push one of the heavy stools to the place, and he already had his hand on the stock of candles, when we heard footsteps in the gallery at the further end of the library; it was Brother Ischirion's flapping sandals, and each step brought him nearer to us. Like pilfering school-boys caught by the usher, we extinguished our light and crawled out of sight wherever we could, behind divans and piles of cushions; Marco, crouching on top of his stool, held himself in readiness to blow out the monk's lamp if he should pass within reach. We had decided to frighten him rather than allow him to take cognizance of our experiment in vagabondage; but he was the one

who froze our blood by the strange scene which we were forced to witness.

He carried an enormous basket which was evidently very heavy, and he walked slowly, holding his lamp high to guide his steps through the labyrinth of old furniture. When he was quite close to us, he halted in front of the closet containing the small library and the prince's prize volume. There, still holding his lamp and depositing his basket beside him, he took from it one by one the twelve dried skulls which we had seen on the tower; then, with the hands which prepared his master's food and his guests', he carefully, one might say lovingly, arranged those ghastly trophies in line on the most prominent shelf; after which he scrutinized them closely, straightened the line, as he might have done with the dishes on a table, and with his knotty fingers smoothed the beards which still hung down from some of the chins.

The poor devil was simply obeying the prince, who, to oblige our ladies, had ordered him to conceal those heads, and to preserve them carefully in his museum; but the sangfroid which he displayed in that ghastly occupation irritated Marco, who threw a handful of candles at him, at the same time imitating the cry of the screech-owl, and jumped down from the stool with the purpose of beating him. We held him back; the wretched monk, prostrate on the floor, invoked in a plaintive voice all the gods and saints of the Slavic paradise, and resorted to every means to exorcise demons and sorcerers. His lamp had dropped from his hands and was smoking among the folds of his gown. We were able to make our escape unseen by him, but as we departed, we imitated the cries of various animals, each according to his powers, so that he might believe that he had to do with spirits of the night.

We no longer had a light and we lost ourselves in the darkness. By some means or other we found ourselves in a sort of bay between two timbers, near a vaulted ceiling dimly lighted from below. Below us, in the depths of a sort of chapel, we saw the prince standing in a small pulpit, facing a dozen or more men, young and old, lords or peasants, officers of his company of partisans, and all equally noble: it was the council of war in the chapter-hall. Klementi was haranguing them in a ringing voice and in an energetic and determined tone. As we could not understand a word of the Slavic tongue, we felt justified in looking on, as from a box in the fourth tier, at that solemn scene, which did not lack animation. I cannot say whether the orator was eloquent. Perhaps what he said was commonplace to the last degree, and I presume that nothing more was necessary to impress men so thoroughly convinced of their rights and so well disposed to cut off the heads of miscreants; but his pronunciation was melodious and his inflection excellent. When he had finished, we came near applauding him. Bellamare restrained us and hastily led us away before our presence was discovered.

At last we found our apartment, which was sufficiently remote and isolated to permit us to talk loud and without constraint. Inasmuch as it was the principal object of our expedition to make sure of that, we determined to be satisfied. We found supper served in our large room by Moranbois and Régine, who had arranged their stock of provisions on a table a foot high, surrounded by cushions to sit upon, according to the Oriental custom. Anna and Purpurin had done a little foraging on their own account. They had found their way to the pantry, and while Brother Ischirion was arranging the heads on the shelf in the library, they laid hands upon divers sweetmeats and several bottles of Greek wine. So that our supper was very presentable, and with the coffee, the Turkish pipes, and jest and song we kept it up merrily until three in the morning,

I felt a little disturbed inwardly, however, despite the nonsense which flowed from my lips as a matter of habit. The beauty of the prince and the prestige of his abnormal mode of life had overexcited the imagination of our female companions, despite the severed heads. Tall Lucinde, little Anna, even stout Régine, did not conceal the fact that they were madly enamored of him. The discreet Impéria, on being questioned, answered with the mysterious smile to which she resorted on certain occasions:

"I should lie if I told you that I did not consider this paladin an admirable figure on horseback. When he dismounts, and above all when he speaks French, he loses a little of his prestige. Such a man as that ought to speak only the language of the age of fable; but after all, it isn't his fault that he is our contemporary. Yesterday I was too tired to look at him; to-day I did see him, and if he continues to be what he seems to be thus far, that is to say, a combination of Tasso's Tancred and Homer's Ajax, I shall agree with these ladies that he is an ideal creature; but—"

"But what?" said Bellamare.

"But the beauty which speaks to the eyes," she continued, "has only a momentary influence; the eye of the body is not always the eye of the heart."

I fancied that she looked at me as she spoke, and I was angry with her; love reawoke in me with the return of health, and I could not sleep. As Léon was in the same plight, I asked him, in order to divert my thoughts from my personal trouble, if he had noticed Anna's admiration for our host. He answered in a bitter tone which surprised me.

"What have you against me?" I asked.

"Against you, nothing," he replied. "I have a grudge against women in general, and against the one you have just mentioned in particular. She is the vainest and most hare-brained of them all."

"What does it matter to you? You must laugh at her. You don't love her, you never loved her."

"That is where you are mistaken," he replied, lowering his voice;

"I did love her! Her weakness seemed charming to me; she was pure then, and if she had had patience to remain so a little while, I should have been fool enough to marry her. She was fool enough to yield too hastily to her absurd infatuations."

"Luckily for you; you ought to be grateful to her."

"No, she made me distrustful and misanthropic at the very outset of my career. Shall I confess everything? It was for her sake that I became an actor, just as you did for—"

"For no one! what are you talking about?"

"Your prudence and silence do not deceive me, old fellow! We are both wounded to the heart, you by a love which you have conquered for lack of hope, I by a love I buried for lack of esteem."

That was the only time that Léon ever opened his heart to me. I saw plainly enough afterward that, if he no longer loved Anna, he still suffered because he had loved her.

On the following day, Brother Ischirion came to tell us that the prince wished to know at what hour it was the pleasure of the ladies to dine with him. Before giving our answer we attempted to ascertain his highness's custom. The monk's replies tended to show that our hero was both abstemious and a glutton. Like the wolves he could fast for an indefinite time, and at need eat dirt; but when he was at his own table, he ate for four men and drank for six. As a general rule, he ate but one substantial meal a day, at three in the afternoon. At morning and night he contented himself with a sweetmeat or two. We determined to conform to his programme, on condition that we should have, in addition to the sweetmeats, eggs, cheese and plenty of ham. All this being arranged, we asked the good monk why he was so pale and seemed so weak and languid. He charged his fatigue to the account of the enormous banquet he had had to superintend on the preceding day, and was careful not to speak of his vision in the library. I ventured to ask him artlessly why the heads were no longer on the tower. His pallor changed to a livid hue, he made a cabalistic sign in the air, and answered, with a wild look in his eye, as he hurried from the room:

"God alone knows what the devil does!"

"Here is a fine opportunity to go on with the rôle of the devil," said Bellamare; "let us go and get the heads and put them out of sight."

"It is all done," replied Marco; "I didn't choose to go to sleep without having a little fun. I took a shovelful of live coals and stole back to the library. The monk had sneaked away, leaving his lamp on the floor and his great basket open; I stuffed the heads into it and carried them away."

"Where the devil did you put them?" cried Régine; "not here, I trust?"

"No! I hid them in a hole in an old wall and stopped it up with stones. I mean to keep them there until I discover where that old



brute roosts. Then I will decorate his bed with them; I mean to frighten him to death; it will be a lesson in cleanliness for him."

"You would do better," observed Moranbois, "to administer the lesson to the master instead of the servant."

"I will think about it," rejoined the little clown gravely.

At three o'clock the resounding rattle of a deafening gong announced dinner, and a footman in livery, whose European costume formed a striking contrast to his long moustaches and martial countenance, made his appearance and informed us by gestures that dinner was served. Purpurin, recurring to civilized ideas for the first time since our shipwreck, and forming his own estimate of the things about him, declared that that Montenegrin *Cossack* made a pitiful appearance in his dress coat, and that he proposed to give him a lesson in deportment and good manners. So he hastily donned an old stage livery of the cut of Louis the Fifteenth's time, put on a powdered wig, a little paint, and white cotton gloves, and when we reached the refectory planted himself, with an important but affable air, behind the chair assigned to Bellamare. The outburst of frantic laughter which took possession of us and lasted a long while, and the pleasant surprise produced by the sight of a table, a real table laid in European fashion, with all the implements which make it unnecessary to tear meat with one's nails, caused us to forget that we were ravenously hungry, that the dishes were growing cold, and that the prince was making us wait longer than became a man brought up in France. At last the door at the end of the room opened, and we saw first of all a diminutive groom of the most pronounced Parisian type, in irreproachable English costume; then a tall, thin young man, dressed in the penultimate French style, that is to say four or five years behind the times. He was a pretty boy, but ungraceful, and the lower part of his face had what I may call a sort of rough-casting of weakness or shyness. We supposed that he was a secretary, perhaps a kinsman of the prince, also a graduate of College Henri IV.; perhaps his brother, for he looked like him. He spoke, apologizing for having bestowed too much time upon a sort of toilet to which he had become somewhat unaccustomed of late. O horror! it was the prince himself, made younger and thinner by the sacrifice of his mighty moustaches, clean-shaven, curled and pomaded, his arms imprisoned in a black coat, his chest drawn in by a white waistcoat with fine pearl buttons accompanied by far too many gold chains; the prince degenerated from Ariosto's paladin into an Italian *dandy*, or, better still, into the *Schiavone* disguised as a *monsieur*, of which we had seen many examples the year before at Venice, where they make themselves intolerable to quiet people by their chattering, their foolishness and the uproar they make in the theatres.

Our Klementi was more intelligent and better bred than those denationalized petty lordlings who go from home in search of civilization, and who do not always bring back its best features. There was a

chivalrous, feudalistic side to his character, which prevented him from being ridiculous; but, as the French strain inherited from his mother had become atrophied in his rough and warlike life, that part of it which he tried to furbish up for us was neither perfectly fresh nor of the first quality. That reverse side of the lovely medallion aroused regret for the antique Greek profile of the preceding day. The cameo had become once more a hundred-sou piece.

Without his picturesque costume he seemed to me nothing more than a third-class actor. In plumed cap and white kilt he had seemed to speak our language as well as we did ourselves; when dressed like us, his faults of enunciation grated on our ears. He had a disagreeable lisp and made use of vulgar or high-flown expressions. It was much worse when he tried to be playful after our manner. He had kept in reserve since his boyhood—and he was thirty-two years old—a collection of old jokes which had been bandied about too freely in the small theatres to seem amusing to us. The jests which are perpetrated on the stage are already worn out when they are turned over to the public. You can judge whether they seem new when they have gone through two or three hundred performances! The prince insisted, however, upon repeating them to us, to let us see that he was *au courant*, and instead of talking to us about his romantic country, his battles and his adventures, things which would have been profoundly interesting to us, he talked about Odry in *Les Saltimbanques*, or the scandalous adventure of certain hangers-on of the opera, already superannuated and completely forgotten.

He tried to be gallant, too, although he was chaste and cold, like every man who has three wives, that is to say, two too many. He thought that it would please our actresses; but Régine alone answered him, and he found that he was on the wrong track with the others. Although he frequently lacked good taste, he did not lack shrewdness.

The dinner was copious enough to enable us to eat only what was eatable. The rest was an absurd conglomeration of dishes which must have been scandalized to find themselves in company. Garlic, honey, peppers and buttermilk got along as best they could with meats and vegetables. The prince devoured everything indiscriminately. Moranbois, intending to allude to the repast of the ancients, remarked in an undertone that our host was a *gueulard* like the old Greeks. The Parisian groom, who was a malicious little monkey, heard him and grinned from ear to ear with delight. The rascal was immensely entertained by Purpurin's extraordinary appearance, and as he waited at table he kept nudging him in a way that seriously impaired the dignity of our stage footman. The other servants, of whom there were five or six planted about us, grave and stately in their national costume, were there for show only and stood as motionless as statues. Luckily the groom, who was as active as a lizard, ran from one to another, filling our glasses with champagne made at Trieste, Vienna or somewhere else, which would soon have gone to our heads if it had been good

enough to make us imprudent. Moranbois was not hard to please, but he could drink with impunity; Lambesq considered himself still too ill to take any risk, and Marco, being seated beside Léon, was forced by him to be careful.

The prince alone became a little excited, and, as his warlike instinct awoke, he said a few words to us at dessert concerning the never-ending struggle of his country against the Turks. A goodly supply of ambition was mingled with his patriotism, and he gave us to understand that he was likely to be chosen leader of the permanent insurrection, the unwavering purpose of which was to secure the unity and independence of the country.

Someone sent for him and he left the room, begging us to wait for him at the table. Thereupon, the groom, who was a stunted youngster of twenty-two, drunk with joy to find someone to talk to, and ambitious to talk to real actors, mingled unhesitatingly in our conversation.

"Don't you go and believe all my master tells you," he said. "He's a terrible man in a battle, I don't say he isn't, but not more so than others. There are fifty or more princes like him, who agree well enough in hammering those dogs of Turks; but they all want to command in chief. My master won't get there, he's too much of a Frenchman; his mother was no more noble than I am, and his father didn't descend in a straight line from the Klementis of old times. People here don't look kindly on the European airs monsieur puts on, and these bodyguards you see here, standing as stiff as candles, and not understanding a word we say, despise us; they would like to wring my neck because I shave monsieur when he chooses to be clean for a while."

"If he chooses to be clean, it is to please us, apparently," said Régine; "but tell us, my boy, doesn't that shaved moustache prove that your master doesn't expect war for some time to come, for that blue lip wouldn't be *en règle*?"

"It proves perhaps," replied the groom, "that monseigneur proposes to try a bold stroke and doesn't mean to be recognized; no one knows. But it's all one to me; peace and war are so much alike in this land of brigands that you can't tell the difference."

"Brigands?" cried Lucinde; "I have always wanted to see one. You say there are some about here?"

"There's nothing else, mademoiselle, and you see some standing round you now."

"Nonsense! These handsome fellows?"

"As true as I am standing here! They're like the wolves: they don't do any harm when they are not hungry; but when they are in want of everything, woe to the poor devils who have a fancy to visit their mountains! They are very gentle, and hospitable even, when everything goes well with them, but when they are pressed too hard by the Turks, they must needs take from strangers the wherewithal to buy bread and powder. Fine fellows all the same! but they're rather savage

and you mustn't tease them. Then there are parties of bandits of all countries infesting the frontier; they call themselves patriots, but they are not to be trusted. Never go to walk further away than the little lake, and never venture into the mountains. I say this seriously."

This intelligent, bold-faced youth, whose name was Colinet, and whom his master had nicknamed Meta—half man—would gladly have chattered away all night; but the prince returned and invited us to take our coffee in his salon, which was daintily furnished in the style of the later Empire, and very interesting. He showed us the whole suite—his bedroom, decorated in the French style, with a French bed on which he never slept, preferring a bearskin in winter and a mat of rushes in summer, his boudoir and his study. These rooms were very rich, with gilding on all sides, but characterless and entirely devoid of comfort. We preferred to remain in the Oriental salon, where we were supplied with magnificent *chibouques* and detestable cigars. But the thick coffee was beginning to seem delicious to us; one becomes accustomed to it, and the strong native Maraschino no longer seemed so formidable as at first.

The prince drank so much of it that he fell into a torpid state closely resembling sleep. Impéria took out her lace; Régine, spying a pack of cards, challenged Moranbois to a game of bezique; Bellamare challenged Léon to play chess; Lambesq took up a copy of the *Siècle* three weeks old, and Marco fell asleep, as he always did when he could not laugh and play pranks. The evening was threatening to be altogether too peaceful for us, when the prince, sitting up on his couch, began to recite some verses of Racine's, pretending to have forgotten them, in order to lure us into declaiming them before him.

"This is making us pay our scot a little prematurely," said Bellamare in my ear; "but it's quite as well to pay cash as to run into debt. Let us go about it cheerfully."

The prince asked for a scene from *Phèdre*, That was one of Lucinde's parts, but she had lost her voice on the reef and had not fully recovered it, and she was too proud of that fine organ to consent to endanger it; she urged Impéria to take her place.

"I have never taken any part but Aricie," said Impéria. "Phèdre is not in my line, and I have never studied it."

"That makes no difference," said Bellamare. "You know the part, and, at all events, Moranbois is here."

Moranbois had an extraordinary memory and knew the whole classic repertory by heart. He concealed himself behind a screen, Impéria and Régine draped themselves in huge Cashmere shawls with which the prince provided them, and, taking their position at a suitable distance, the lights being properly arranged and the royal arm-chair placed where it belonged, they began the scene:

*"Ah! that I were seated 'neath the forest shade!"*

I was curious to see how Impéria, whose voice was of a crystalline rather than of a tragic timbre, would repeat those contralto lines, and how her refined and moderate action would adapt itself to the gloomy attitude of the woman devoured by love. She had laughed beforehand at the fiasco she was certain to make, and had begged us to applaud her none the less, so that the prince, who was not likely to be a connoisseur, would not detect her shortcomings.

Imagine my surprise and Bellamare's and everybody's, when we saw Impéria suddenly change her expression and, as if inspired by the idea of the part, assume instinctively, having never sought it, the crushed and absorbed attitude of the victim of destiny! Her eye sank in its orbit and became as fixed as if she were still on that accursed reef, gazing at the disappointing sails as they faded away on the horizon. All that we had suffered passed through our minds and a shudder ran through our veins. She felt it in the air about her, and her face assumed an expression which we had never seen upon it. Her irreproachable diction became gradually more emphatic, her cold breast heaved, and her frail voice, now almost strident, rang out in tones of distress, rebellion and excitement which resembled nothing we had ever heard. Had she an attack of fever? or was it we who were delirious? She caused us to shed real tears, and that emotion, necessary doubtless to people who had forced themselves to laugh in the very jaws of death, excited us to frenzy. We applauded, we shrieked, we threw ourselves into one another's arms, we kissed Impéria's hands as we told her that she was sublime. We made more noise than a crowded theatre. The prince was forgotten as completely as if he had never existed.

When I remembered him, I saw that he was staring at us in amazement; doubtless he took us for madmen, but it was a play all the same. He fancied that he was studying the private life of actors, concerning which society people are tremendously curious, and of which he was privileged to catch a glimpse at an altogether exceptional moment.

He was deeply interested. All that we had to do was to avoid boring him. So that everything was for the best. He had no need to ask us for another scene, for we all had a frenzied craving to act in tragedy and to be stimulated and excited by one another. Moranbois the Hercules went to fetch the costume chest. The prince's boudoir served as a dressing-room for the men, his study for the women. Like an ass, he commented on our modesty, and Moranbois, who could never hold himself in check for long, said to him in the most courtier-like tone he could muster:

"So Your Highness had taken it into his head that we were no better than beasts?"

The prince deigned to roar with laughter at this sally.

In a quarter of an hour we had put on our smallclothes and arranged our draperies. I was Hippolyte, the rôles of Thésée, Aricie

and Théràmène being respectively filled by Lambesq, Anna and Léon. We played the piece through, I don't know how; we were all lifted off the earth by the talent which made itself manifest in Impéria. It seemed that the shipwreck had revolutionized her artistic temperament; she was nervous, feverish, sometimes admirable, always heart-rending. She followed the hazard of inspiration; she did not realize what she was doing. She was seized at times by a longing to laugh which resolved itself into sobs. That longing to laugh began to attack our nervous systems also; it was the inevitable reaction after our tears. When Léon came to Théràmène's narrative, which he detested, he pretended that he could not remember, and Marco, being warned by him, pushed Purpurin in front of Thésée, dressed in a most excruciatingly funny costume. Overjoyed to display his dramatic talent, he began thus, blending his two favorite passages:

"No sooner had we left Trezena's gates,  
'twas in the silent watches of the night,  
My mother Jezebel. Her guards in dire distress—"

He could go no farther. The prince threw himself back on his cushions, laughing heartily, and that was the signal for an outburst of uproarious hilarity on our part.

While we were taking off our costumes, Bellamare was treated to a comic scene wherein the prince was the actor.

"Monsieur l'impresario," said that artless potentate, "you have played a trick on me, I don't know why; but I have discovered it, and you may as well confess the truth. This young actress whom you call Impéria—that is a *nom de guerre*, isn't it?"

"We all have *noms de guerre*," replied Bellamare, "and that one conceals no secret worthy to interest Your Highness."

"I beg your pardon. I recognized Mademoiselle Rachel perfectly."

"Who?" cried Bellamare, almost speechless with surprise. "Which?"

"Impéria, I tell you. I saw Rachel once, in this very play of Phèdre. It is her figure, her age, her voice, her acting. Come, confess it, and do not try to deceive me any longer. It is really Rachel, and she has forbidden you to betray her incognito, in order to punish me for not recognizing her at once."

Bellamare was too honest to lie, and at the same time too mischievous to renounce the entertainment which the prince's strange mistake promised to afford us. He insisted that Impéria was not Rachel, but he said it in a hesitating way and with symptoms of embarrassment which convinced our host that he was not mistaken.

When Impéria returned to the salon, Klementi kissed her hands respectfully and tenderly, and begged her to accept the shawl which

she brought back to him. She declined, saying that she had not sufficient talent or reputation to justify her in accepting such a gift. Lucinde, who came next, considered her a great fool, and bitterly regretted that she had not played Phèdre. Régine said to her in an undertone:

“Take it; you can give it to me if you don’t want it.”

The prince seemed hurt by her refusal. Bellamare took the shawl and told the prince that he would make her accept it; but he adroitly placed it in His Highness’s bedroom, judging rightly that it would not do to exploit the name of Rachel, and that the present would not be acceptable to Impéria until it should be offered her in appreciation of her own talent.

When we had returned to our quarters, he regaled us with the anecdote, adding that Impéria had disclosed qualities that evening which made our host’s mistake very excusable.

“Hush, my friend,” said Impéria, suddenly becoming sad. “I appreciate better than you do what I was tonight. I tried an experiment, I acted by inspiration, thinking that I was detestable, and determined to try it again if I made you laugh. I made you weep because you needed to weep; but you will laugh to-morrow if I repeat my performance.”

“No,” said Bellamare, “I know what I am talking about; what you happened upon this evening was genuinely fine, I give you my word of honor.”

“Very well,” she rejoined, “if that is so, I shall not happen on it again to-morrow, as I did it unintentionally.”

“We shall see,” said Lucinde, who had, like the rest of us, yielded to the enthusiasm of the moment and applauded her companion, but who had had enough of it already, and did not propose to be run off the field.

“Let us see at once,” said Bellamare, with the intense earnestness which he always carried into his instruction; “if it was a mere fleeting inspiration, such as so many distinguished artists have had just once in their lives, never to recur, I propose to find it out! Begin that scene again:

“Ah! that I were seated—”

“I am tired,” said Impéria, “I can’t possibly do it.”

“Tired? an additional reason! Come, try, I insist upon it, for your own good, my girl! Try to carve your inspiration on the marble before it has grown cold. If you find it again, I will note it down, and then I will carve it for you so that you will never lose it again.”

Impéria sat down and tried to arrange her attitude and her features. She could not repeat her expression or her tone.

“You see,” she said, “it was merely a passing breath. It may be,

indeed, that I really did nothing. You all shared one of the hallucinations characteristic of excited imaginations."

"Then will it be the same with you as with me?" I said. "I had the sacred fire on a certain evening, and afterward—"

"It happens to everybody," rejoined Bellamare. "I remember playing Arnolphe one night without speaking through my nose. I had beaten my wife in the morning, and I was as radiant as the stars. Just because one falls back into what is natural to him after one of those prodigies, it doesn't follow that he cannot repeat it and make it permanent. Never be discouraged, my children; great is Apollo and Bellamare is his prophet!"

The next day Bellamare was summoned by the prince to his study.

"You must show your courage," he said, "even though you are still a little tired. I hoped to allow you a few days to repose; but the situation of my affairs forces my hand, and moreover Rachel's presence among you—Don't say no, for my groom talked this morning with your *jeune comique*, who admitted everything; it is really Rachel, hiding behind the name of Impéria. I could not be mistaken, you see! Rachel's voice is still in my ears and her delicate profile before my eyes. If she persists in concealing her identity, do not thwart her, we will pretend to keep her secret; but the influence of her real name and the charm of her marvellous talent will be of very great advantage to my country. Understand me; no one is capable of controlling a vast insurrection. All these petty nobles, who are equally brave and devoted to the cause, are all equally lacking in the two essentials: money and intelligence. I am rich, I have had the education which makes a man out of a savage. So that the welfare of all is in my hands, if they will only open their eyes. There are prejudices against me just on account of my education, of which they do not realize the advantages. They call me a merry-Andrew because I love the wits! Help me to fascinate and charm these uncivilized minds. Recite to them noble verses which I will translate to them in my own way, and whose rhythmical solemnity will compel their respect. Show them fine costumes, sing for them stirring songs of war; I know that you are all musicians—and—and—and if Rachel, going back a very few years, if Rachel would consent to sing them the *Marseillaise*, which, so they say, excited the French people to frenzy—Come! I know that she refuses to sing it any more; but here, under a transparent pseudonym—Impéria, imperatrix, that is so easy to read! I know that that song tires her terribly, but I have jewels to reward her, and more beautiful shawls than the one she refused yesterday. As for you, monsieur l'impresario, I will consent to whatever you wish. You made no conditions on coming here; now is the time. Sit at my desk; write and I will sign."

Any other than Bellamare, unless he were a downright knave, would have been embarrassed to accept this offer; but he could be an honorable man and a clever man at the same time; he chose his



course on the instant, and wrote as follows:

“Prince Klementi hereby engages Sieur Bellamare’s troupe for one month, at one thousand francs for each performance given in his château with Mademoiselle Impéria in the cast. In addition, the sum of one thousand francs for each performance is to be paid to the said Mademoiselle Impéria, provided that, at the close of said engagement, Prince Klementi persists in considering her equal to Mademoiselle Rachel in tragedy and in her singing of the *Marseillaise*; otherwise, nothing shall be due to said Impéria except such a present as the said prince shall deem it proper to bestow upon her.”

The prince considered this an ingeniously worded engagement, signed it, and paid a thousand francs in advance. Bellamare, as he withdrew, said to satisfy his conscience:

“I swear to your highness that Impéria is not Rachel.”

“Excellent! excellent!” laughed the prince. “Call your people and select your theatre. I will send out my invitations for Sunday.”

He rang for Meta, who, having been in his service three years, had learned the language of the country, and ordered him to act as interpreter between the members of the troupe and such workmen as should be employed. From that moment, Meta, who was passionately attached to us, never left us except to dress and shave the prince.

He was an intelligent youngster, audacious and corrupt, a typical Paris *gamin*, who boasted of having played his part on many a barricade. He had seen Rachel *gratis*, and being perfectly certain that she was not among us, he maliciously encouraged his master’s delusion, having the ascendancy over him which spoiled children are allowed to obtain. So that he was the principal author of the romance the action of which was about to begin.

Léon blamed Bellamare’s *mezzo termine* severely, and declared that we were making a Jesuitical use of Rachel’s name. Impéria felt great repugnance to being the means of playing such a trick on the prince in the presence of his guests; but he displayed such obstinate or well-feigned earnestness, and all our efforts to undeceive him were so utterly fruitless, that all our scruples vanished and we gayly prepared to act Corneille and Racine in the convent-bishopric-palace-fortress of Saint-Clément.

We could find no better place than the monumental library. There was room there for an audience of four hundred, the maximum mentioned by the prince, and also for a pretty little stage, with its wings, dressing-rooms, and stairways. The stout shelves, which had formerly held folio manuscripts and printed volumes in all tongues, were taken down and rearranged so as to form an excellent gallery for the audience. We had all the workmen we required, active and obedient. They were soldiers in the prince’s army. We sent for two monks from the new convent, who, thinking that they were decorating a chapel, painted for us in water-color, in the Greco-Byzantine style, a very pretty stage-front, and the *manteaux d’Arlequin*, that is to say,

the front wings, which serve to set off the others. A huge rug performed the functions of curtain; it was a little heavy and required four men to work it, but that did not concern us. Moranbois undertook to arrange the scenery, which he understood better than anyone else. Léon sketched it and I painted it with the assistance of Bellamare and Marco. The curtain at the rear of the classic peristyle for the tragedy had been repaired at Gravosa. Lambesq did his best to repair the instruments which had suffered. The orchestra, that is to say the quartette which took the place of one, was hidden in the wings, so that the actors engaged in the performance could take their places in it from time to time, and not be seen by the audience playing the violin or double bass in the costume of the emperor or his confidant. Bellamare introduced an innovation: a coryphée, in guise of chorus, recited a piece of verse at the beginning and end of the acts. These verses, imitated from the old texts, were very fine; they were written by Léon. The orchestra accompanied them, using mutes, with a solemn, monotonous melody which I had composed, that is to say stolen, but which produced an excellent effect.

While we made these hasty preparations, Impéria was studying the *Marseillaise*, which she had never sung in her life nor heard Rachel sing; she simply knew that the great tragedienne, having no voice and no musical method, had composed a sort of dramatic chant, which she acted and declaimed rather than sang. Impéria, being a musician, could not deal so roughly with the musical theme, and could not hope to attain the statuesque beauty, the veiled and awe-inspiring accent of her who had been called the Muse of Liberty. Her pure voice delighted to sing, but she was too gentle to *armer des bataillons*. She determined to render the song according to her own nature, which was calm, resolute and tenacious at bottom. She appealed to the chords of her proud and stoical will; she was perfectly simple, she sang with perfect straightforwardness, she looked her auditors in the face with a fascinating fixity of expression, she marched toward them, putting out her arms as if she were marching to death amid a storm of bullets, with contemptuous indifference. This interpretation of hers was a masterpiece of intelligence. The first time that she tried it before us, the first verse surprised us, the second began to excite us, the third carried us off our feet. It was not an appeal to enthusiasm, it was a challenge, and all the more inspiring because it was cold and disdainful.

"That's the way!" said Moranbois, who, you remember, was the infallible judge of effects, consequently of results. "That is not the *Marseillaise* shrieked for the *titis*, nor draped for artists; it's the *Marseillaise* spat in the face of the *capons*!"

During all these preparations we saw the prince only at dinner. He had much to do on his side in assembling and enticing his audience, its most important members being separated from him by mountains and precipices. Those chiefs of clans were not very hard

to entertain. A common apartment, rugs and cushions—that was all they required. They brought all their luggage in their belts; weapons, pipes and tobacco. By not allowing their wives to go abroad and be entertained with them, they simplified the burdens of hospitality very materially. An audience without women cooled our ardor at first, but it spurred on Impéria's enthusiasm for the *Marseillaise*.

Lucinde had resumed her rôle of Phèdre, and the whole audience, except the prince and his groom, seriously took her for the illustrious Rachel. Impéria recited the coryphée's lines in admirable style, but no great heed was paid to her. When she appeared at the end of the play, in short tunic, red cloak and Phrygian cap, carrying a banner of the colors adopted by the local insurrection, they thought better of their indifference, and the *Marseillaise* produced the same effect as upon us. They listened in silence, then a murmur rose, like the first breath of a storm, then they were seized with a sort of frenzy which found vent in yells, stamping and threats. A bright flash passed through the hall; it was caused by all the yataghans being drawn from their belts and brandished over their owners' heads. All those long impressive faces which had been gazing at us from the beginning of the performance with a majestic and coldly benignant attention, became terrible to look upon: moustaches bristled, eyes flashed fire, fists were shaken threateningly skyward. Impéria was terrified; that audience of lions of the desert, who seemed to be on the point of rushing upon her, roaring and showing their claws, very nearly caused her to flee into the wings; but in the midst of the uproar, Moranbois shouted to her in his hoarse voice:

"Hold your effect, hold it! go on, go on!"

She did what she believed that she could never do: she went forward to the footlights, braving the frenzy of the audience and maintaining her immovable fearlessness, which her slender figure and her childish type of face made even more affecting. Thereupon, there was an irresistible outburst of sympathy in the hall; all those heroes of the *Iliad*, as Bellamare called them, threw innocent kisses to her, and tossed their silk and gold sashes on the stage, with their gold and silver chains and even the rich buckles from their caps: it took us an hour to pick them all up.

The prince disappeared during the uproar. Where was he? Although he was most ingenuous with us, he was very wily in dealing with his own countrymen, and he had carefully arranged his *effect*. He had received his guests in French costume, taking pleasure in irritating them by that affectation of superiority, and determined to compel them to accept him as a *métis*—half-breed—who was in no respect inferior to any of the pure breed. In the intermission afforded by Impéria's protracted and noisy triumph, he hurriedly donned his most gorgeous ceremonial costume and replaced his magnificent moustache, which was always false, his own natural one being a paltry affair. In

this guise he stalked upon the stage and presented the supposed Rachel with an enormous nosegay of mountain anemones and myrtle blossoms, the stalks being passed through a diamond bracelet.

He accompanied this offering with a speech in the language of the country, which he delivered with his face toward the audience, and which voiced the ardent patriotism and the implacable vendetta-like spirit which the singer's genius had stirred and set to vibrating in those heroic hearts. Then, seeing that his guests hesitated to approve the sudden transformations of his personal appearance, he added a few words, pointing to his cloak and his beard and striking his hand against his heart. It was easy to understand him then. He told them that a man's worth did not depend upon a costume, which anyone could procure with money, nor upon a moustache, which a barber could plant anew as well as remove, but that it depended upon a noble heart which God alone could place in the breast. He emphasized this last sentence so strongly, and his gestures were so energetic, that he produced the effect he sought, like a consummate actor who had trodden the boards for years. He had certainly studied Lambesq and declaimed quite as well as he, in his own tongue. We gave the signal for applause in the wings, and the audience, carried off its feet, gave him the ovation to which he aspired.

Impéria, on returning to the green-room, fainted from fatigue and excitement. On recovering her senses, she saw at her feet the pile of tokens of admiration which had been tossed to her. She bade Morambois take charge of them as belonging to the association, and, despite our remonstrances, we had to consent to their being placed in the common cash-box. She retained only two lovely sashes, which she presented to Régine and Lucinde, who were not members of the association. Bellamare insisted however that she should take the diamond bracelet and wear it before the prince, who would not understand her refusal to do so, and would attribute it to scorn of the value of the proffered gift.

We acted in tragedy four times in one month, each time before a larger audience; and the *Marseillaise* always aroused the same transports of excitement and brought a shower of gifts on the stage. It was the same as at Toulon, except that the offerings were more magnificent; and as the prince persisted in trying to persuade himself and the others that nobody but Rachel was capable of singing the *Marseillaise* as Impéria sang it, we found ourselves in possession of a handsome sum of money and of a very considerable amount in antique jewels, richly embroidered fabrics, knives, pipes and other rich and curious objects. Impéria became seriously angry when we tried to make a distinction between her interests and ours. She insisted that the articles of association should be carried out strictly according to the letter. The only use that she made of her advantage over the rest of us was to provide that a handsome bonus should be given to the paid members of the troupe. Even Lambesq was not excluded, despite all his

offences. He had delivered his lines in sonorous tones with a Cyclopean energy which had produced a greater effect than Léon's correct and conscientious acting. So that he had contributed to our success and we owed him some compensation. He did not expect it and seemed profoundly grateful.

Success is life to the actor, it means safety in the present, unbounded hope, confidence in his lucky star. We were bound to go together like brothers and sisters; jealousy, malice, quarrels were at an end; we were all perfectly devoted to one another, our gayety was inexhaustible, our health excellent. We had the extraordinary exuberance of vitality and the childish lack of foresight, which are characteristic of the profession when everything goes well. We studied earnestly, we introduced improvements in our *mise en scène*. Bellamare, having no outside cares, was entirely at our service and helped us to make real progress. Léon was no longer melancholy. The pleasure of hearing his verses delivered intelligently by Impéria inspired him anew. We led a charming life in our little oasis. The weather was superb and enabled us from time to time to take long walks through a region of awe-inspiring splendors and hidden wonders. We did not see so much as the shadow of a brigand. To be sure, when we proposed to venture a short distance into the mountains, the prince provided us with an escort; on those occasions we generally went hunting, and the women would join us with provisions and lunch with us in the wildest spots. We had a craze for discovering new places, and no one ever thought of being dizzy.

The inhabitants of the valley had taken a liking to us, and their hospitality was really touching. They were the most honest and mildest-mannered people on earth. At night, when we returned to the fortress, it seemed as if we were returning home, and the creaking of the drawbridge behind us caused no unpleasant impression. We prolonged our studies, our literary discussions, our merry badinage, our laughter and fooling, far into the night. We were never fatigued, never bored.

The prince often went away, and always unexpectedly. Was he preparing a *coup de main*, as his groom thought, or was he working up the passions of his party, preparatory to assuming the supreme command? Meta, who talked more than we asked him to, declared that there was a deal of intriguing both for and against his master, that he had one rival of a more serious turn of mind than he, one Danilo Niegosh, whose chances were better in the province of the Black Mountain, where Klementi would certainly be beaten, despite his efforts, his outlay of money, his receptions and his theatre.

"There's only one thing that could make him successful," he said, "and that would be to capture from the Turks, single-handed, some strong fortress. That's the way it is in this country. When these gentry all act together, each one of them does as much as any other; so that the ambitious ones would like to make a bold stroke without letting

anyone know; or carry out successfully, with just their own little band, some undertaking which the others have declared impossible. That is how it is that they sometimes do astonishing things; but that is also how it is that they are very often roasted for having attacked someone stronger than themselves, so that they have to start all over again."

Perhaps the groom was right; but we could not help admiring those handsome nobles, uncivilized in manners and morals, but proud and untamable, who would rather lead the life of savages in their inaccessible mountains than abandon them to the enemy and live in civilized lands. We felt more esteem and sympathy for them than for our prince, and it seemed to us that the other chiefs had no reason to envy him his literary acquirements and his sham beard. We considered that it would be absurd on our part to try to inoculate them with a civilization of which they had no need, and which had had no other effect on the prince than to deprive him of half his poetic charm.

Perhaps you will think that we were wrong, and that we argued too much from the actor's standpoint; possibly we did. The artist is very fond of local color, and pays little heed to the obstacles it puts in the way of progress. As I have told you, he doesn't go to the bottom of things; he would drown there. He is a combination of imagination and sentiment.

We did not argue with the prince; it would have been altogether useless, and he gave us no time. When he joined us at our rehearsals, or when he invited us into his Byzantine salon, he squeezed us like lemons, to press out our wit and our merriment for his own benefit. Did he really long to be amused and to forget in our society his feverish ambition, or did he practise playing the part of a frivolous man with us, in order to put the suspicions of certain rivals to sleep?

Whatever his idea may have been, he was perfectly amiable and companionable with us, and we could not refuse to be amiable to him. To be sure, he made us pay our scot at his table and earn the money called for by our contract, for he often asked us to act for him alone, *gratis*, and he laughed till he cried at Bellamare's excellent comic acting and Marco's refined burlesque; but he had shown no signs of distrust or stinginess, and we did not propose to be behindhand with him. If his tone was not always unexceptionable, he had at all events the wit to overwhelm our actresses with attentions and civilities without paying court to anyone of them. As Anna continued to rave over him, we feared some disturbance of our friendly relations. We do not play the pedagogue with our actresses, but we detest men who bill and coo before the eyes of us actors and force us to pretend to be jealous or indulgent, when, in fact, we are neither. In the provinces and in a small company, the situation is sometimes unendurable, and we were no more inclined to submit to it in an Oriental palace than in the wings at Quimper-Corentin. Anna had been warned that if the prince threw his handkerchief at her feet, we would be neither confidants

nor witnesses of her intrigue.

The prince, instead of concealing his amours, was shrewd enough to abstain from love-making altogether. He wished to keep us in good-humor and in full possession of all our talents. He did not choose to sow discord in our private circle, and we were very grateful to him on that account. We owed to him a month of unclouded happiness. I need to remind myself of that in order to speak of him with justice. How far we were from anticipating the ghastly tragedy by which we were to pay for his splendid hospitality!

But I must come to that heartbreaking, atrocious scene, the remembrance of which always causes the cold perspiration to start at the roots of my hair.

We had fulfilled our contract. We had played *Phèdre*, *Athalie*, *Polyeucte* and *Cinna*. The prince kept his promise and made us rich. When he settled with us he showed us a letter from Constantinople in which he was told that Zamorini had started for Russia. That swindler had broken his contract with us, we owed him nothing. He left us to pay for our journey, but we were too well indemnified to complain, and Bellamare hesitated whether we should go to Constantinople on our own account, or return to France by way of Germany. The prince advised the latter course; in Turkey we should meet with nothing but disappointment, danger and wretchedness. He urged us to go to Belgrade and Pesth, predicting great success for us in Hungary; but he begged us not to come to any decision until after his return from a short journey he was obliged to take. Perhaps he would ask us then to remain another fortnight on the same terms. We promised to wait three days, and he departed, telling us again and again to look upon his house as our own. He never had been more agreeable. He persisted so obstinately in taking Impéria for Rachel, that he said to her as he bade her adieu:

“I hope that you will not carry away unpleasant memories of my wild country, and that you will say a good word of me to your generals and ministers.”

So we remained there, perfectly easy in our minds, under the guardianship of a garrison of twelve men, who attended to the service of the house as well as of the fortress, being household servants and soldiers in turn. I have told you that they were fine-looking, solemn fellows who did not understand a word of French. A sort of lieutenant whose name was Nikanor—I shall never forget it—and who was in command in the prince’s absence, spoke Italian very well, but he never spoke to us. We had nothing to do with him, his functions being purely military. He was a tall old man, whose sidelong glance and thin lips did not attract us. We imagined, not without reason, that he entertained a profound contempt, perhaps a secret aversion for us.

We were waited on by Brother Ischirion and little Meta, and we did without them as much as possible. The monk was dirty, inquisi-

tive, fawning and treacherous. The groom was loquacious and familiar, *amusing, but a blackguard*, as Moranbois said.

Not without regret therefore did we see that our little Marco was becoming so intimate with that boy that they called each other thou, and was cutting loose from us more and more, to roam through the cloisters and servants' quarters with him. Marco replied to our reproaches that he was the son of a workman of Rouen as Meta was of a Parisian workman, that they had talked the same slang from childhood, that Meta had quite as much intelligence as he, in short that neither of them was any better than the other. He alleged as a pretext for his constant prowling about with that Frontin, the pleasure of driving the monk wild, for he was an old nuisance and detested them both. It was easy to see that the monk did hold them both in horror, although he never complained of their malicious pranks and seemed to endure them with angelic patience. The history of the Turks' heads still lay heavy on his heart. He had found them on an altar in a small oratory where he performed his devotions and secreted his sweetmeats. He had readily divined the author of that profanation. I don't know whether he complained to the prince. The prince knew nothing about it so far as we could see, and the heads had never appeared again.

As our table was as bountifully supplied as the resources of the country and Ischirion's culinary ideas allowed, we had formally forbidden Marco and Meta to abstract anything whatsoever from the pantry, and if they continued their pillaging they did it on their own account and without our knowledge.

One day they came to the rehearsal with agitated faces, laughing a strange laugh, convulsive rather than jovial. We did not like to have Meta between our legs while we were studying. He disturbed us, because he fingered everything and did nothing but jabber. Bellamare, losing patience with him, turned him out of the room a little roughly, and scolded Marco, who had kept us waiting and who rehearsed as badly as could be. Marco began to weep. As that did not often happen, and as he was really at fault, we thought it best to allow Bellamare's lesson to make a deep impression on him, and we made no attempt to reconcile them at once. After the rehearsal he disappeared. We never forgave ourselves for our severity toward him, and Bellamare, always so sparing of reprimands and so like a father to young artists, has always blamed himself for it as a crime.

We always dined at three o'clock in the great refectory. Neither Marco nor Meta appeared. We supposed that they were sulking, like the children they were.

"How silly they are!" said Bellamare; "I forgot their wrong-doing long ago."

Night came and our evening meal was served by Ischirion in person. We asked him where the young men were. He answered that he



saw them go out with lines to fish in the lake, that they had undoubtedly returned too late and had found the drawbridge raised, but that there was no cause for anxiety. Anywhere in the village they would find people ready and eager to take them in until the next day.

His theory was so plausible, we had been so hospitably greeted whenever we walked through the village, that we were not at all worried. And yet we were struck by something that Lambesq said when we returned to our room. He asked us if we knew that the prince had a harem.

"Not exactly a harem," replied Léon; "it is what is called an *odalik*, I think. He isn't, like the Turks, married to one woman and owner of the others by right of purchase. He simply has several mistresses, who are at liberty to leave him but have no desire to do so, because they would be sold to the Turks. They live on excellent terms with one another, probably because that is customary among women in the East, and they are kept concealed because that is the manner of loving of the men hereabout, or because it is a point of honor with them."

"That may be," rejoined Lambesq; "but do you know in what corner of this mysterious mansion they are walled up?"

"Walled up?" repeated Bellamare.

"Yes, walled up, and securely too. All the doors which formerly communicated with the part of the convent they occupy have been permanently closed; it's the former laundry, where there's an excellent well. The laundry has been made into magnificent baths, a small garden has been laid out in the courtyard, there's a pretty little summer-house, and those three women live there and never come out. There's a negress to wait on them, and two men to guard the only door of their prison, to which the prince goes at night by a passageway cut in the wall. Our dear prince is modest in his gallantry, like all Orientals."

"How do you know all these details?" inquired Bellamare in surprise. "It can't be that you have been imprudent enough to go prowling about the place?"

"No; that would be in very bad taste," replied Lambesq, "and God knows whether the ladies in question are houris or drabs. However, I have never been tempted; but that saucy rascal of a groom found the key to the mysterious passage in the prince's apartments, and he has used it several times to see the ladies in the bath without being seen."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No; Marco told me; and indeed—"

"Indeed what?"

"I don't know if I ought to tell you—he confided it to me one evening when he was tipsy and was rather more friendly with me than was necessary. I could have done very well without his confidence; but I confess that I was curious to find out whether he was laughing at me, and he gave me details which proved to my satisfaction—Well, I

think it's only right that you should know; Meta took him with him to see the odalisques at their toilet, and the boy's head is turned. I'll wager he was there yesterday when we were waiting for him to come to rehearsal, and it may well be that it's a dangerous business for him. I don't know how the prince's *icoglans* would take the joke if they should catch him in the act of gratifying his curiosity."

"Psha! we are not among the Turks," rejoined Bellamare; "they wouldn't impale a man for that here; but the prince would be very ill-pleased, I suppose, and I propose to put down such escapades by stern measures. Marco is a good fellow; when he understands that these foolish little tricks of his may cast suspicion on our honor, he will give them up. You have done well, Lambesq, to tell me the truth, and I regret that you didn't do it sooner."

We went to bed with our minds at rest, but a vague presentiment disturbed my sleep and woke me before daybreak. I thought of Marco in spite of myself, and wished that he had returned.

It had thundered during the night and the air in our apartments was hot and oppressive. I was almost suffocated, but I did not want to wake my comrades; so, without making any noise, I went out on a terrace overlooked by a bastion near by, from which I could see, a little farther away, the entrance tower outlined against a cloudy sky. The greenish gleam of the approaching day accentuated the curious shapes of those motionless masses of vapor. The fortress, in that light, presented the aspect of a solemn and frowning black mass.

It seemed to me that there were several persons on the tower, but they did not stir. I fancied that they were storks asleep on the battlements. Meanwhile it grew lighter, and it soon became impossible for me not to recognize the Turks' heads, triumphantly replaced upon their iron stalks. It was undoubtedly contrary to the absent prince's orders, for he could not have intended to offer that direct challenge to the sensitive nerves of our actresses; but it was a challenge from his retainers, perhaps a threat intended for us. I returned softly and woke Bellamare, to tell him of my discovery. While he dressed in order to go with me to make sure of the fact for himself, the day had freed itself entirely from the clutches of the night, and we distinctly saw Marco and Meta looking at us through two of the *crenelles* on our side of the tower.

"Have they made them prisoners, in God's name?" queried Bellamare; "and were they compelled to pass the night in the society of those severed heads, to punish them—"

His voice died away on his lips, as each second increased the brilliancy of the morning light. The two young men were as immovable as if they were chained, their chins resting on the railing of the platform. Their faces were ghastly pale, their half-open mouths were contracted in a frightful grin, they stared at us with sightless eyes. Our gestures and our calling made no impression on them. Drops of blood were trickling down over the stone.

"They are dead!" cried Bellamare, grasping my arm in his clinched fingers; "they have been beheaded. There is nothing there but their heads!"

I almost swooned, and for several moments I did not know where I was. Bellamare also turned giddy and staggered like a drunken man. At last he succeeded in recovering his self-control.

"We must find out," he said, "we must punish—Come!"

We woke our comrades.

"Listen," said Bellamare to them, "an atrocious thing has happened, a shocking murder. Marco and Meta! Hush! not a word, not an outcry. We must think of our poor women, who have suffered so much already!"

He went and locked their door and handed Léon the key, saying:

"You are not strong, you cannot help us. I place the women in your care; if anyone should come and molest them, strike our tam-tam; we shall hear you, for we are not going out of the house. Don't say anything to them if they don't wake before the usual hour and don't try to come out. They can't see the horrible sight from their room.—Come, Moranbois! come, Laurence! in the matter of muscle you two are worth ten men; I, too, am strong when it is necessary—And hark ye, Lambesq! you are a stout fellow too, but you are not fond of Marco. Are you generous enough, a loyal comrade enough, to be willing to avenge him even at the risk of your life?"

"Do you doubt it?" replied Lambesq, with an air of fearlessness and sincerity which he had never displayed on the stage.

"Good!" rejoined Bellamare, grasping his hand with fierce energy. "We must arm ourselves, with daggers above all, there are plenty of them here."

Moranbois opened the chest and we were armed in a twinkling; then we went to the entrance tower. It was not guarded, no one seemed to have risen in that part of the fortress; the bridge was not yet lowered. The sentry on the neighboring bastion glanced at us indifferently, and did not pause for a moment in his monotonous pacing to and fro. His orders made no provision against our design.

First of all, we desired to make sure of the truth, indubitable though it was. We ascended the spiral staircase of the tower and found at the top only the bleeding heads of the two ill-fated children. They had been cleanly severed by one of the Damascus blades which Orientals wield with such cruel skill; their bodies were not there.

"Let us leave the heads where they are," said Bellamare to Moranbois, whose teeth were chattering with grief and wrath. "The prince returns to-day; he must see them."

"Very well, he shall see them," replied Moranbois; "but I don't propose that these innocent creatures shall remain in the company of these Turkish swine!"

And, as he felt that he must vent his fury upon something, he snatched the dried skulls from their supports and hurled them on the

pavement of the courtyard, where they fell with a dull thud and were crushed.

"That does no good," said Bellamare.

But he could not prevent it, and we left the tower after covering the two unhappy creatures with our handkerchiefs, for we would not leave them to be a derisive spectacle to their murderers. We took the key of the tower, and as we left it we saw that, although the sun had risen, the drawbridge was still raised, contrary to custom; we were prisoners.

"That makes no difference to us," said Moranbois; "we have nothing to do outside."

There were two men on guard under the drawbridge. Bellamare questioned them. Their orders forbade them to reply, and they pretended not to understand us. At that moment, Brother Ischirion appeared on the other side of the moat. He carried a basket filled with eggs which he had been to the village to get. He must therefore have been astir early enough to know what had happened the evening before or during the night. Bellamare waited until he had been admitted, and, as Moranbois shook him roughly to make him speak, we had to intercede for him; he was the only man who could understand us and answer our questions.

"Who murdered our comrade and the prince's groom?" Bellamare demanded of the bewildered monk. "Come, you know all about it, don't feign surprise."

"In the name of St. George the Great," replied the monk, "don't break my eggs, your excellency! they are all fresh, for your breakfast."

"I will crush you like a snake," said Moranbois, "if you pretend not to understand! Was it you who murdered those children? No, you would never have had the courage; but it was you who spied on them, denounced them, betrayed them, I am sure of that, and I promise you that you sha'n't carry your vile head to paradise."

The monk fell on his knees, swearing by all the saints in the Greek calendar that he knew nothing about it and that he was innocent of any evil intention. He was evidently lying; but the two guards, who were tranquilly looking on, began to show signs of excitement, and Bellamare did not want them to interpose until he had obtained an answer from the monk. He forced from him the statement that the only person in authority who could have ordered the execution in the fortress was the commandant Nikanor.

"Indeed, who else could have any authority over individuals?" continued the monk. "There must be some master here in the prince's absence; the commandant has power of life and death over all the inhabitants of the fortress and the village."

"Over you, you dogs of slaves, that may be," said Moranbois; "but we will see if he has that power over us! Where is the lair of your wild beast of a commandant? take us to his den at once, and don't argue!"

The monk obeyed, bewailing his eggs, which Moranbois had broken with his energetic movements, and smiling in his beard at our wrath. He was leading us to the tiger's den; doubtless he hoped that we should never come out of it.

## II

We found the commandant in a low, dark room, with an arched ceiling, at the end of the second courtyard, reclining on a mat and smoking his long chibouque in tranquil majesty. He had no guards. Looking upon us as vile strolling actors, it had never occurred to him that we might call him to account.

"Was it you who murdered our comrade?" demanded Bellamare, in Italian.

"I never murdered anybody," the old man replied, with an imposing mildness which staggered us for a moment. And without changing his nonchalant attitude, he puffed at his pipe and looked in another direction.

"Let us not play upon words," rejoined Bellamare. "Were the two young men murdered by your orders?"

"Yes," replied Nikanor, with unmoved sang-froid, "it was done by my order. If you are not satisfied, apply to the prince, and if he blames me, I have deserved blame; but I have no account to render to anyone but him. Be prudent and leave me at peace."

"We did not come here to respect your repose," retorted Bellamare. "We have certain questions to ask you, and you must answer, whether you like it or not. Why did you condemn those poor creatures?"

Nikanor hesitated a moment; then, emphasizing the measured moderation with which he spoke Italian, he answered:

"For an offence which concerns the prince alone."

"What was the offence?"

"The prince alone shall know."

"We want to know and we will know," said Moranbois, in his hoarse voice, which assumed a terrifying tone.

And in a twinkling he had seized Nikanor by the beard, thrown him face downward on the floor, and placed his knee on his neck.

The old man thought that his hour had come; he had not deigned to think of defending himself. Doubtless he said to himself that it was too late, and that he was about to undergo the penalties of the *lex talionis*. He held his peace and made no sign of hope or fear.

"I forbid you to kill him," said Bellamare to Moranbois, who was literally beside himself. "I propose to make him confess."

He motioned to us, and we closed the doors behind us and threw the heavy bolt of a very primitive lock. The monk had followed us, from curiosity or to call for help if it became necessary. Lambesq,

spying divers ropes and gags which were kept in that room, quickly bound and gagged him. We had deprived the commandant of his weapons, and, as there were six or seven of the long muskets used by the garrison in a sort of rack, we were in a condition to sustain a siege.

"Now," said Bellamare, raising Nikanor and holding a pistol at his head, "you will speak."

"Never," replied the inflexible mountaineer, in the same ostentatiously indifferent tone.

"I am going to kill you," said Moranbois.

"Kill me; I am ready."

What were we to do? We were disarmed by that stoical contempt for life. Moreover, vengeance was too ready to our hands.

"At least," said Moranbois, "you will tell us the executioner's name?"

"There was no executioner. I myself killed the culprits with the sword you have in your hand. If you use it against me, you will commit a crime. I simply did my duty."

"I will not kill you," rejoined Moranbois, "but I long to beat you like a dog, and I'll do it. Defend yourself; you are the strongest man in the country; I have noticed you in the drills. Come, defend yourself. I propose to throw you down and spit in your face. But no outcry, no signal to your people, or I'll blow your brains out as I would any coward's."

Nikanor accepted the challenge with a contemptuous smile. Moranbois seized him around the waist, and they stood for an instant, in close embrace and as if turned to stone, so tense were their muscles; but at the end of that brief instant Nikanor was once more at the feet of the Hercules, who spat in his face and cut off his moustaches with the blade which had cut off Marco's head.

We looked on at that righteous punishment without moving hand or foot, for our comrade's blood was between us and any feeling of pity; but we could not kill a disarmed adversary, and we held ourselves in readiness to prevent Moranbois from getting too drunk on his own wrath. Suddenly we were enveloped in a cloud of smoke, and bullets began to sing about our ears from the window of the ground-floor. By some inexplicable miracle they struck no one but the unlucky monk, whose arm was broken. Before the soldiers who had come to their leader's assistance could renew the attack, we had pushed the captain's long, narrow couch against the long, narrow window. We were besieged, and we were overjoyed to have something to do. They hammered at the door, but it held out. The commandant had swooned and did not stir; the monk writhed and twisted to no purpose. You can imagine that no one of us thought of him. We arranged a loophole between the couch and the enemy, and discharged a volley which put them to flight; but they returned, and we had to shut ourselves in once more and repeat the operation. They concluded that our position was impregnable on that side, and concentrated their efforts on

the door, which yielded at last; but Moranbois held it so that it would admit only one man at a time. Bellamare seized the first one who appeared, throttled him and threw him at his feet; the others as they rushed in almost suffocated him by walking over his body. I took charge of the second. It was a simple matter for us to seize their gun-barrels as soon as they appeared, turn the shot aside and drag the man toward us. They had not anticipated a hand-to-hand struggle. They did not believe us to be capable of such a determined resistance. They had no conception of that spontaneous, impulsive strength which makes the Frenchman invincible at certain times. They were nine against four, but we had the advantage of position. The nine became ten, then twelve—they were all there; but three or four were *hors de combat*, and the others retreated. They took us for demons.

But they came again. They thought that we had killed their commandant, and they proposed to avenge him, though they must all fall one by one. Really, they were brave fellows, and, when we threw them down, we could not make up our minds to kill them. We might have done it. As soon as they were in our power their faces expressed not fear, but stupor, an indescribable, superstitious horror, followed instantly by the fatalist's resignation in face of death, which he believes to be inevitable. We left them lying on the floor, and they did not stir, fearful that they might seem to be asking for mercy.

I cannot say how long that fierce struggle lasted. No one of us had any idea. So far as I could judge from the few words I had learned of their language, they said that we were sorcerers, and talked about going to get some straw to smoke us out; but they had no time: an exclamation outside and the sound of a well-known voice put an end to the battle and the siege. The prince arrived. He commanded silence, ordered all weapons to be put up, and appeared before us, crying:

"It is I! what has happened? explain yourselves!"

We were too breathless to answer. Drenched with sweat, black with powder, our eyes starting from our heads, we were all tongue-tied.

Bellamare, who had fought like a lion, was the first to recover himself, and, enjoining silence on Moranbois, who attempted to speak, he led the prince to the commandant, who had recovered consciousness, as if his master's unhopd-for appearance had recalled him to life and duty.

"Monseigneur," said Bellamare, "this man, with his own hand, cut off the heads of our comrade Marco and your servant Meta, two Frenchmen, for an offence, perhaps a mere mischievous prank, which he has refused to tell us and swears that he will tell to no one but you. We were mad, we were frantic, we were drunk with rage, and yet a single one of us challenged him, threw him to the floor, cut off his moustache—yes, and spat in his face, for I ought to and I will tell everything; if he is not satisfied, we are ready, all of us, to fight a duel with him, one after another. That is all the revenge we have wreaked

upon him, and if it seems to you rather severe, you expect too much of Frenchmen, who hold savage cowardice in horror, and who look upon one who murders in cold blood as an infamous villain. Your soldiers came to their leader's assistance; far be it from me to say that they did wrong; they fired on us without summoning us to surrender—perhaps that formality isn't customary with you—and we defended ourselves. They wounded your cook trying to kill us. We had nothing to do with it as he will tell you himself. We might have killed our prisoners, but we did not even use our weapons, but fought with arms and fists. If they have suffered, so much the worse for them! You do not find us inclined to repentance, and we will all die rather than say that your customs are humane or that the harsh deeds done in your name are just. I have said my say."

"And we agree with you," said Moranbois, pulling his otter-skin cap over his ears.

The prince had listened without the slightest manifestation of surprise or emotion. He was in the presence of his escort, and of Nikanor, who also listened, as impassive and silent as he. He was playing his rôle as a man above other men; but he was pale, and his eye seemed to be seeking a solution which would satisfy the pride of his savages and the demands of our civilization as well.

He took refuge for an instant in that silent meditation before he made any reply; then he suddenly gave several orders in the Slav language. The monk was forthwith taken away, a glass of brandy administered to Nikanor, who had difficulty in standing on his feet, and whom the prince would not allow to sit in his presence; then everybody left the room, and the prince said to the commandant in Italian, in a dry, frigid tone:

"Did you kill Meta and Marco? Answer in the language in which I am questioning you,"

"I did kill them," Nikanor replied.

"Why did you do it?"

Nikanor answered in Slav.

"I ordered you to answer in Italian," rejoined the prince.

"Shall I tell of it before strangers?" said the mountaineer, deeply moved and almost blushing.

"You will tell it, I insist upon it."

"Very well, master, the servant and the actor saw your women in their bath."

"Is that all?" said the prince coldly.

"That is all."

"And you killed them in hot blood, having taken them in the act?"

"No, I was told that it had been going on for several days. I watched them and caught them in the passageway leading from your apartment at two o'clock in the afternoon yesterday. I took them, without a word, to the dungeons, and last night, in the presence of your women, I cut off their heads, which are now on the tower. No



other person except the monk knows the cause of their death. Your honor has not been stained; I did what you ordered, what every man should do, or bid his servant do, or expect his friend to do."

The prince turned pale. He could no longer conceal from us the resemblance between his Christian morals and the morals of the Turks, and he was profoundly humiliated. However, he tried to justify them in our eyes.

"Monsieur Bellamare," he said in French, "if you were married and a cynical rake should come and stare at your naked wife through a doorway, would you forgive him for the insult?"

"No," said Bellamare. "In the first flush of rage I should probably throw him out of the window, or throw him head-first downstairs; but I would do it myself, and if I had two mere boys to deal with, I would content myself with kicking them out of doors. In any event, though I had been even more deeply insulted, though my wife or my mistress had been dishonored, I would not employ any of my fiends to cut off my rival's head in cold blood, and display it in triumph on the roof of my house."

The prince bit his lip and, turning to Nikanor, said:

"You never understood your orders, and like the stupid brute that you are, you have interpreted the laws and customs of our nation according to the Turkish fashion. The penalty of death is to be inflicted on those who make their way into our women's quarters, and who enter into guilty relations with our wives; but this case is different: you did not surprise anyone in the quarters of my women, and you have inflicted capital punishment on two foreigners not subject to our authority and guilty of an offence against their own honor alone. Go and place yourself under arrest, sir, until your punishment shall be decided upon—Justice shall be done," he added in a determined tone.

But I fancied that I could detect a glance which said to the commandant: "Don't be alarmed, you will get off with a few days in prison."

However that may have been, we could ask for nothing more, and no satisfaction offered to our dignity could bring our poor little comrade back to life. We simply asked the prince, in a very stiff tone, that his remains should be given to us to be decently buried.

"That is no more than fair," he replied, evidently disturbed and annoyed by that request; "but I cannot allow the burial to take place openly; wait until night."

"Why so?" said Moranbois indignantly. "An infamous crime has been committed under your roof, and you don't propose to make reparation for it like an honorable man! It makes no difference to us, we need no one to help us to bury our dead; but we want our poor child's body, we want it now, and if it is hidden from us, we will search everywhere for it; and if anyone attempts to prevent us from putting it out of reach of insult—why, we have had a chance to rest, and we will take another turn at mauling your janizaries."

The prince pretended not to hear this harangue, the last word of which, likening him to a sultan, must have offended him deeply. He paced the guard-room with a preoccupied air.

"Excuse me," he said, as if emerging from a profound revery—"What is it that you ask?" he added, addressing Bellamare.

"Our comrade's dead body," Bellamare replied. "Your highness may dispose of your unfortunate servant's body as you please."

"Poor boy!" said the prince, with a deep sigh, real or feigned.

He left the room, bidding us wait a moment. He did not return; but after about ten minutes two of his escort brought us the hapless Marco's mutilated body wrapped in a mat. Moranbois took it in his arms, and, while he carried it away, Lambesq and I went up on the tower to get the poor livid head. We carried the sad remains to our theatre, we wrapped them in the white gown which the young actor had worn a few days before when he played the part of Zacharie the Levite in *Athalie*. We placed a crown of leaves on his head and burned perfumes about him. Moranbois went out to order a grave dug for him in the village cemetery, and Bellamare went to the women to tell them of that which we could no longer keep from them. It was still early; we were surprised, for we had lived ten years since sunrise.

Léon had been terribly anxious until he saw the prince return. He had heard firing; but there was so much shooting for practice in the courtyards of the convent, that he had not looked upon it as necessarily implying that we were in danger, and, as he had given his word not to leave the women, he had remained at his post.

He joined us with them on that tragic stage with the Byzantine front, which we had transformed into a funeral chapel. If you care to contemplate a dramatic scene performed as actors never perform for the public, imagine the picture which my comrades of both sexes unconsciously formed. I myself, worn out by mental and physical weakness, sank down in a corner of the gallery and watched them. The women had all put on mourning; Impéria, standing beside the poor child, piously kissed his marble brow. The other women knelt around the body, praying. Bellamare sat on the edge of the stage, grief-stricken and motionless. I had seen him so but once before, on the reef. Léon leaned against a pillar which formed part of the scenery, sobbing convulsively. Lambesq, really affected, kept the perfumes burning on a beautiful tripod which the prince had lent us for use in the tragedy; then he went from one to another as if intending to speak, but said nothing. He reproached himself for his long-standing hostility to Marco, and seemed to feel that he must accuse himself aloud; but we all forgave him in our hearts. He had really borne himself magnificently in our morning's campaign, and we ceased to have any bitter feeling against a man who really wished to set himself right.

Moranbois returned to inform us that the grave was ready. It seemed to us a too speedy separation from our poor comrade, as if we were in haste to rid ourselves of a painful spectacle. We decided

to pass the night beside him. Moranbois shared our feelings, but he warned us that we had no time to lose in taking our leave. The secret of the harem had not transpired; but, although Nikanor had not betrayed it, the indoor guards had divined it, and were beginning to indulge in dark hints to the people in the valley. The murder of the two boys would inevitably be considered an exceedingly just punishment of an execrable crime. More than one family professed both Christianity and Islamism. In that strange country, patriotic warfare caused religious differences to be overlooked. It was beginning to be known too that the prince's ambition was defeated, that the mountain chieftains had repelled the idea of submitting to a master, and that his soldiers, having flattered themselves that they were to be foremost in the confederation, were humiliated by his failure. They attributed it to his French ideas and were beginning to look with horror on his actors. That is what the prince, who had been talking with Moranbois, had given him to understand. He had advised him to bury Marco in a small clump of cypress trees which was a part of his private domain, and not in the cemetery, where there was a common grave for persons executed, and for enemies of the religion: of which religion?

Moranbois thought that it was best to follow this advice. Being well aware that, if we disregarded the national faith, our comrade's remains would be outraged as soon as our backs were turned, he had accepted the prince's offer and had himself dug a grave at the place he had indicated.

It was a very dense thicket, reached from the rear door of the chapel by a winding path lined with laurels and wild cherries. So that we were able to carry our poor dead comrade thither, unseen, in broad daylight, beneath that impenetrable foliage. The prince had purposely sent all his people away from that part of the estate and from the part of the house through which we had to pass. We had an opportunity to set the body down for a few moments in the Greek chapel; we were very glad that it was so, not that any of us, except Régine and Anna, were very zealous Christians; but we wished to pay to the victim of a barbarous custom all the honors which barbarism placed within our power.

When we had laid the dead boy in his last bed, carefully levelled the earth and covered the grave with moss and dry leaves, Léon, pale as death and with uncovered head, spoke as follows:

"Adieu, Marco, adieu, youth, hope, laughter, the vivifying flame of our wandering life, the gentle and filial companion of our successive labors and hardships, of our careless pleasures and our bitter disasters! This is the most cruel blow of all; we are about to leave you here, alone, in hostile soil, where we must conceal your remains like those of one accursed, nor can we leave a stone, a name, a paltry flower on the spot where you rest.

"Poor dear child, your father, an honest mechanic, being unable to resist your ardent ambition, entrusted you to us as men of honor,

and among us you found fathers, uncles, brothers and sisters, for we all adopted you, and we hoped to protect and guide you for a long time to come in your career as an actor and in life. You deserved our affection, your instincts were most generous, your talent charming. Cast away with us on a lonely reef amid the fierce waves, you were, despite your youth, one of the most self-sacrificing of us all. Evil influence, the fatal enticement of passion led you into a danger which you chose to defy, into a mad undertaking for which you have atoned by a frightful death, but with courage and firmness, I am sure, for no cry of distress, no despairing appeal to your comrades broke the ghastly silence of the accursed night which parted us forever.

“Poor dear Marco, we loved you dearly, and your memory will never be effaced from our hearts, we shall think of you always with a loving benediction! Ye trees of death, keep the secret of his last sleep beneath your shadow! Be his winding-sheet, ye winter snows and wild-flowers of the spring! Ye birds who fly above our heads, winged travellers more fortunate than we, ye are the only witnesses upon whom we can call! Nature, indifferent to our tears, will at least open her motherly bosom to that which was a living being, and will bear back to God, the principle of all life, that which was a soul. Ye spirits of the earth, mysterious essences, breezes and perfumes, indefinable forces, receive the spark of generous vitality left here by this child whom the ferocity of men has immolated, and, if some unfortunate exile like ourselves should chance to trample on his grave, whisper of him: ‘Here lies Pierre Avenel, called Marco, murdered at eighteen far from his native land, but blessed and lamented by the tears of his adopted family.’”

Impéria set the example and we all kissed the ground at the spot beneath which lay the poor child’s head. We found the prince waiting for us in the chapel. He was very sad, and I think that he spoke sincerely on that occasion.

“My friends,” he said, “I am terribly distressed by this double murder, and, perpetrated under such circumstances as it was, I consider it a crime. You will carry away a deplorable opinion of us; but put yourself in my place. I have attempted to introduce some civilization into this uncivilized country. I believed that it was possible to drive the notion of progress into these heroic, but hard and narrow brains. I have failed. Shall I have my revenge? I do not know. Perhaps I shall carry off the palm at the very moment that I am laid low by a Mussulman’s bullet. Perhaps you will see me in France, sated with dangers and disappointments, consoling myself in the *foyer* of arts and letters. Whatever the future may bring forth, retain a little esteem for me. I do not regret having made you my associates in a noble undertaking. Whether Rachel is here or elsewhere, the actress who has charmed me so may retain in all security the homage of my pleasure and my gratitude. Henceforth I must deprive myself of lofty pleasures, and I can realize that my house must have become hateful to

you. We must not wait until it has become an impossible residence for you; for, you see, I am not always so absolute a master as I seem to be. I am going now to give orders that you be allowed to depart to-morrow at daybreak, quietly and without hindrance. I will give you as reliable an escort as possible, but be armed in case of emergency. I cannot accompany you, for my presence would be an additional cause of irritation against you. I know that you are brave, yes, and formidable adversaries, for you handled very roughly some of my men who thought themselves invincible. They are not to be feared at this moment; but they have kinsmen outside, and the vendetta is far more terrible in our mountains than in those of Corsica. Be prudent, and if you hear anything like an insult or a threat as you pass, do what I often do, pretend not to hear it."

Then he asked us where we wished to go. We had no idea, but we instantly determined to return to Italy. We had a horror of the East, and, in that first moment of consternation and anger, we felt that we should always have to tremble for one another there.

"If you return to Gravosa," said the prince, "my little villa is still at your service for as long a time as you choose. Do not take the scenery and costumes, for they may embarrass and delay your progress in the mountains. I will send them to you to-morrow."

We packed our trunks that evening, and the next morning at daybreak presented ourselves at the drawbridge. The mules, horses and escort were ready on the other side of the moat; but, with what seemed to us calculated moderation, we were kept waiting a long while for the bridge. At last we crossed the valley without seeing anyone, and entered the gorge which plunged into the heart of the mountain. We were not without apprehension; if we had enemies, they would certainly lie in wait for us there. Our guides, four in number, rode forward heedlessly; their horses moved faster than our mules, and when they were well in advance they did not turn to see if we were able to keep up with them, but continued to increase their distance. If we had been attacked, they probably would not have turned.

However, we were not molested, we saw no hostile faces, and about three o'clock in the afternoon we had covered two-thirds of the distance across the mountains, and were near enough to the plain to believe that we were out of danger. We did not know that the boundary of the prince's state was just where the greatest danger lay.

It was much warmer than when we first crossed the mountains, and our beasts acted as if they proposed to refuse to go on. Our escort halted at last, seeing that we had halted under compulsion, and one of them gave us to understand by signs that there was water a short distance away, if we wished to drink and to water the mules.

We were not thirsty, for we had provided ourselves with water in bottles; but the animals, especially the one which bore our little treasure and our most valuable belongings, persisted in going toward the place he pointed out. We had no choice but to follow them. When

we saw the precipice to which they were leading us, we dismounted and let them go. Our guides had done the same with their horses; one man alone followed them, leaping from rock to rock, to prevent them from remaining in the water too long. Moranbois held back the pack-mule, which could not have climbed up again with its burden; but, before he had relieved it of the chest—I should say the valise which contained our valuables—it escaped from him and rushed into the ravine.

Moranbois, fearing that our property would be lost, fearlessly followed the beast. We knew how strong and dexterous he was, and the way could not be wholly impracticable, as another man had taken the risk. However, we were much disturbed and by no means free from anxiety when we saw him disappear in the underbrush which covered the slope. An instant later, unable to restrain myself, I followed him, saying nothing to the others of my anxiety.

The ravine was even deeper than we had thought. About halfway down it became less difficult, and I was beginning to get a glimpse of the bottom, when a man of repulsive, filthy aspect, and armed with a gun aimed at my head, came out from behind a rock and said to me in bad French:

“You no stir, no be afraid, no yell—or you dead man! You come, you look!”

He grasped my arm and led me two steps forward. Thereupon I saw, in a sort of perpendicular tunnel, through which, I believe, a tiny thread of water was trickling, Moranbois the fearless, the invincible, floored by six men who were binding and gagging him. Standing about were twenty or more other men, armed with guns, pistols and knives, making all hope of rescue impossible. The guide and the other animals had disappeared. Moranbois’s mule alone was in the hands of those bandits, who were just beginning to strip him.

All this I saw with despairing vividness in a twinkling. I could not fire at the bandits without risk of hitting the prisoner. I realized instantly that I must keep quiet.

“No do any harm,” replied the repulsive blackguard who held my arm. “Ransom, ransom! that’s all!”

“Yes, yes,” I shouted with all my strength, “ransom! ransom!”

And the interpreter answered my shout, presumably repeating the word to his comrades in their language.

Instantly every arm was raised toward us in token of assent, and my companion continued:

“You leave all up there—horses, boxes, guns, jewels, money. No do harm to you.”

“But he!” I cried, pointing to Moranbois; “I must have him, or we will have you all killed!”

“Shall have him safe and sound; do quick, or him dead man. Tell up there and go ’way! Find him at foot of mountain.”

I rushed up like a hurricane. Bellamare and Léon had heard

strange voices and were coming to meet me.

"Remount," I said breathlessly. "Help me; let us remount!"

In three words they understood everything, and there was not a moment's hesitation. Defence was impossible; our three remaining guides had disappeared. Doubtless, not daring to revenge themselves, they had led us into the trap and betrayed us to the brigands of the frontier.

We left everything behind, even our cloaks and our weapons. We threw everything on the ground with feverish, delirious haste. We had but one thought—to hasten as quickly as possible to the foot of the mountain and find our friend. Perhaps they were deceiving us! perhaps they were murdering him while we were leaving everything in order to save him. No matter; with one chance of safety for Moranbois and a hundred against us, we could not hesitate.

The bandit, who had followed me, was perched upon a rock, his cocked musket in his hands. We paid no heed to him. When he had made sure that we were taking nothing away, that we displayed the utmost conscientiousness in complying with his demands, he deigned to call out to us: "Thanks, excellencies!" with a sneeringly polite air which made us laugh nervously.

"Here, here!" cried Impéria, handing the bandit her diamond bracelet, which she was on the point of carrying away thoughtlessly on her arm. "This for you! Save our friend!"

The rascal jumped down like a cat, seized the bracelet, and attempted to kiss the hand which offered it to him.

"Him! him!" exclaimed Impéria, drawing back.

"Run," he replied, "run!"

And he disappeared.

He travelled as the crow flies, while we had to make a long circuit. At last we arrived, in sore distress, at the appointed place. There lay Moranbois, across the path, still bound and gagged, and unconscious. We hastily unbound him and examined him. They had kept their word and had done him no harm; but his struggles to free himself had exhausted him. It was more than an hour before he recovered consciousness.

We carried him down into the plain, for we had seen from a distance a band of thirty or more bandits pounce upon the booty we had left, and we were afraid that the whim would take them to come and rob us of our coats and perhaps insult our women. Clearly, they were cowards, as they had resorted to an ambushade; but we were no longer to be feared, thanks to the precaution they had taken to make us lay aside our weapons.

When we came in sight of a number of wretched houses, our first impulse was to hasten to them; then we feared that we should stumble upon some associates of a band which had ventured to rob travellers so short a distance away, and we plunged into a thicket of box trees and lentisks. We could no longer carry Moranbois, we could no

longer support the women. We all dropped on the ground. Moranbois came to himself, and after an hour's rest, during which we did not exchange a word for fear of attracting the attention of new enemies, we resumed our journey across a barren rock-strewn plain. We headed for a small wood which we could see in front of us, on the right side of the road; when we arrived there it was dark.

"We must either stop here or die," said Bellamare. "At daybreak to-morrow we will find out where we are and decide what to do. Come, my friends, let us thank God! We are spoiled children of His, for we have saved Moranbois!"

These words, uttered with a sublime accent of conviction and cheerfulness, stirred every fibre in our hearts. We threw ourselves into one another's arms, exclaiming:

"Yes, yes, we are very fortunate and God is good!" The Hercules burst into tears; it was probably the first time in his life.

It was a cold night and seemed very long to us. We had no cloaks to shelter us and nothing to eat or drink after a day crowded with fatigue and terrible emotions; but no one thought of complaining, nor did any one dream of telling the others of his discomfort and suffering. The women were as stoical as we. The *accursed reef* had *retempered* us, as Moranbois said, and we could endure a hard day and a bad night.

At daybreak, we tried to find out where we were. The road that wound across the plain proved to be the road to Ragusa; we had simply to cross the Dalmatian mountains, and we started, still fasting. We passed houses, but we had not a sou to pay for anything to eat. We searched ourselves thoroughly; a sleeve-button or two, overlooked in our general divestment for purposes of ransom, a few handkerchiefs and an earring—that was enough to live on until we reached Ragusa, and we considered ourselves rich for a day. After that it would be death or beggary, another new phase of that adventurous existence which seemed determined not to spare us any form of bad luck.

We spied in front of us a small farm which had something of the aspect of a Norman oak plantation.

"Let us knock at yonder door," said Bellamare; "but we must not frighten the people, and we present a pitiful aspect—Arrange your dress a little if you please, mesdames; give a little style to your shapeless hats; fasten your torn skirts with pins, if you have any—Retie your cravats, messieurs—and do you, Laurence, tuck in that strap end which looks like a tail. The stupid fools of this region are quite capable of taking you for a *Nyam Nyam*."

I felt for the strap end and pulled it out; it was the remains of the belt I always wore under my waistcoat, in which I kept my bank-notes. As I had been unable to unbuckle it quickly enough, I had jerked it impatiently, and, as it was badly worn, it had broken. I had tossed what I found in my hand on the pile of booty we left behind, believing that I was conscientiously sacrificing my last resource.



Imagine my surprise when, on glancing at the portion which had remained about my loins, I saw that it still contained my five thousand francs practically intact.

"A miracle!" I cried; "my friends, fortune smiles upon us, and the gypsy's lucky star protects us! Here is money enough to take us back to France without asking alms. Let us have a fine breakfast if we can. I have the means of replacing the sleeve-buttons and handkerchiefs which we will use to pay our scot, for my paper-money won't pass current in this desert."

We made a most excellent rustic repast provided by some very hospitable people, who talked to us by gestures and were so well pleased with us, that they sent us a good bit on our way in an old-fashioned sort of a cart, with huge wheels, which shrieked like the damned. Our little gifts were very effective.

We arrived at Ragusa less jauntily than we had left it. Our first care was to hasten to the French consulate, where I changed one of my bank-notes, and where we narrated our unfortunate adventure. We were told that there was no hope of recovering our property; we were very fortunate to escape with our lives.

The *heiduques*, as these brigands were called, must have been very numerous at that moment, and the different bands must have been afraid of each other, as they had not taken time to relieve us of our clothes, even of our shirts. They had probably refrained from murdering us in order not to attract other birds of prey by the noise of a battle; they had contented themselves with robbing us hurriedly, in preference to sharing their booty with new comers.

Lambesq, who was naturally suspicious, believed that the prince had had a hand in that exploit, with the design of recouping his expenses; but the rest of us refused to share that opinion. The prince had failed us in but one respect, so far as we could see; that was in providing us with such a small and unreliable escort; but had he not warned us that he could do no better? Moreover could we be certain that our guards had betrayed us? Seeing that the bandits were in force, and having no desire to be killed for our sake, three of them had fled. The fourth, the one who had probably been taken with Moranbois, must have been killed, as he could not hope to furnish any ransom.

The chancellor of the consulate told us that our bandits were certainly strangers in the country. The natives kill for revenge and do not rob the dead except in wartime. They are unacquainted with the Italian custom of ransom. I remembered that the villain with whom I made my agreement was of a different type and had a different accent from the country people.

However all conjectures were useless, we were ruined beyond recall. We busied ourselves making preparations to depart two days later. We did not choose to make money out of our disaster by beating the bass drum in order to pick up a few sous in that country; moreover, we were too tired to work. On the following day our costumes

and scenery arrived, despatched by the prince without any knowledge of our misfortune. If he had known of it, he would undoubtedly have offered us some compensation, and we might have accepted it but for the memory of poor Marco, which stood between us and his generosity. We did not choose even to write him of what had befallen us. If he should deal harshly with our guides, it might cause a revolt against him to break out. There had been victims enough—We had but one idea—to leave as soon as possible that country which had been so disastrous to us.

We bought a few clothes and engaged passage on the Austrian Lloyd's packet for Trieste. As we were supping in the only hotel in the city and talking over our late experience, Moranbois observed that it had cost us more than it was worth.

"Hush," rejoined Bellamare, "there is nothing so good as a man of heart, and nothing better for the health than a noble impulse!—Let us see, my beloved comrades, are we not happier at this moment than we were when we left that infernal fortress? We carried with us a fortune which had been, in very truth, procured at too bitter a price. We could not help detesting the barbarians who had given it to us at the cost of one of our most dearly prized heads! Every pleasure that that money might have procured for us would have weighed upon our hearts like remorse, and we could never have made merry without seeing Marco's pale face among us. Now that face will smile on us; for if the dear boy could come back, he would say: 'Don't weep; you did for another what you could not do to save me, and that time you were more successful.'—Come, Moranbois, don't be cast down any more. Is it because you were thrown, for the first time in your life, my Hercules? Did you suppose that you could fight thirty men single-handed? Or do you utter those sighs in the capacity of treasurer? What is there so much out of the way in our finances? When we left here, five weeks ago, we were not very rich; we were very proud to be able to earn so much in so short a time, but it wasn't natural, it could not last; and we are still on our feet, for we have our working tools, our scenery and our costumes. One of us has recovered as by a miracle the necessary funds for current expenses. We shall have a good rest at sea; we will salute the *accursed reef* as we pass, and make faces at it; after which we will work, and we will display talents of the first order—you will see! Even Purpurin will repeat his lines correctly. What would you have! we have suffered much together, and these hours of devotion to one another have increased our stature. We have gained something better than wealth, we have become better men and women. We love one another more; perhaps we shall continue our bickerings at rehearsal, but we know beforehand that we shall forgive everything and that we can quarrel without ceasing to love one another. Since we left Saint-Clément, everything has been for the best, I tell you, and I drink to the health of the brigands!"

Our minds were guided by Bellamare's words, and I can imagine

no discouragement from which they would not have rescued us. We were, like all actors, very satirical and very facetious with one another; but he, who was the most facetious and satirical of us all, was inspired by such an ardent conviction on serious occasions, that he made us as enthusiastic as himself. So that we did not waste a regret on our vanished fortune, and Moranbois had to make the best of it with the rest.

While we were crossing the Adriatic, we were all anxious to find the *accursed reef*. We could certainly have identified it among a thousand; but we either did not pass it at all or passed it during the night. In vain did we question the crew and the passengers; they could give us no information, as we had christened our island at random, and no one was enough of a navigator to give sufficient details to persons competent to locate it. Two or three times it seemed to us that we recognized it in the evening mist; it was always a vision; where we fancied that we could recognize familiar shapes, there was nothing.

"Let us keep that rock in our imaginations," said Léon. "It will always be more terrible and more beautiful so than if we should really see it."

"More beautiful!" cried Régine; "did you consider it beautiful, in heaven's name? What madmen poets are!"

"No," rejoined Léon, "poets are wise, indeed they are the only wise people on earth. When others are anxious and terrified, they dream and meditate; even when suffering, they see; they enjoy, to the very last, the power of observing and appreciating. Yes, my friends, that was a grand spot, and I have never realized the fascination of the sea so fully as during that week of agony when we were alone face to face with her, side by side with her, constantly insulted and threatened by her blind wrath, constantly protected by that rock which she has been gnawing for incalculable ages, unable to consume it. But we were in the monster's very belly, and I often thought of the legend of Jonah and the whale. Doubtless the prophet was cast away, as we were, on a reef. In his day everything was described in metaphor, and perhaps his place of refuge had the fanciful shape of the Leviathan of the Bible; perhaps he may have hollowed out a cavern there, as we did, for shelter during his three days and nights of shipwreck."

"Your theory is an ingenious one," rejoined Bellamare; "but pray tell us your impressions of our seven days and nights in the belly of the rock, for I confess, for my own part, that I was not wise enough to admire anything except our obstinacy in refusing to die there."

"To describe meditations constantly interrupted by the spectacle of the martyrdom of others is impossible," replied Léon. "You others did not wish to die, and each one of you was providentially supported by his instincts or his predominant thought. Régine thought about assuring her salvation on condition that she need not fast; Lucinde felt that she was still too beautiful to give up the game; Anna—"

"Oh! as for me," said Anna, "I had nothing at all to support me.

I was ready to die."

"No! for you shrieked with fear when you saw death coming."

"I shrieked without knowing why; but when I succeeded in calming myself, I did it by the thought of seeing again in another world the two poor little children I had lost. But let us talk about the others, if it's all the same to you."

"I," said Bellamare, "thought of you all, and I never appreciated you all so thoroughly. My friendship for you blended with my artistic feeling, and I fancy that I kept repeating this sentence unconsciously, for I could not get it out of my head; 'What a pity that there is not an intelligent audience here to see how grand and dramatic they are!' Seriously, I mechanically took note of all possible *effects*. I studied the ragged clothes, the attitudes, the groupings, the vagaries, the accent, the color and the form of all those scenes of despair, heroism and madness!"

"And I," said Impéria, "constantly heard mysterious music in the wind and waves. As I grew weaker, that music assumed more definiteness and emphasis. A moment came, during the last days, when I might have written down some beautiful refrains and sublime harmonies."

"For my part," said Lambesq, "I was irritated by the clatter made by the stones we piled up in arranging our refuge, when the wind scattered them: it was like the derisive applause of a disappointed audience, and I was furious with the leader of our *claque* for letting our success go adrift."

"You see," rejoined Léon, "that you were all attached to life by force of habit and by the obstinate domination of your respective specialities. It is not surprising therefore that, until the moment that I saw the tartan bearing down on us and recognized Moranbois's face at the helm, I was engrossed and sustained by the craving to admire and describe. That archipelago in which we were confined, those bare, jagged rocks which at their base reflected the dull tones of the sea, and at their summit all the ethereal tints of the sky, the odd, repellent, cruel shapes of those desert islets which we could not reach, and which seemed to beckon to us like instruments of torture, eager to crush us and tear us asunder with their sharp teeth—it was all so grand and so menacing, that I felt eager to measure my strength with those awe-inspiring things by means of poetry. The more keenly I felt our abandoned and powerless plight, the more I thirsted to crush by the genius of inspiration those frowning giants of stone and the implacable fury of the waves. I was indifferent about death, if only I might have time to compose a masterpiece and carve it on the rock."

"And did you compose that masterpiece?" I cried. "Come, you must repeat it to us!"

"Alas!" replied Léon, "I thought that I had done it! As I was too weak to scratch the rock with a knife, I wrote it in my note-book. I kept it in my bosom during the days of torpor which followed our

rescue. I tried to read it over secretly; I could not understand it, and I persuaded myself that that was a result of my physical weakness. When I felt that my health and courage were restored, at Prince Klementi's, I discovered with dismay that my verses were not verses at all. There was neither rhyme nor rhythm, indeed there was no sense in the idea. They were the product of complete mental alienation. I consoled myself by the reflection that that frenzied desire to make rhymes, even in the death-agony, had at all events made me insensible to suffering and superior to despair,"

"My children," said Bellamare, "if we do not find our reef on this trip, it is probable that we shall never have the time or the means to look for it again. Doesn't it seem incredible to you that within two days' sail from Italy, in the midst of civilized Europe, on a narrow sea crowded with vessels, we were cast away on an unknown island, as if we had been seeking some undiscovered land in a voyage of exploration toward the pole? This adventure of ours is so improbable that we shall never dare to tell of it. No one will believe us when we say that the captain and two sailors who were wrecked with us died without telling us the name of the reef, without knowing it, in all probability, and that the men who came there after us, and who might have told us its name, did not find one of us capable of understanding and remembering it. I confess that, for my part, I was altogether idiotic. I continued to go and come mechanically; I nursed you all, and Impéria helped me. Léon and our poor Marco also attended to the sick. But it would be impossible for me to say how long we were in going to Ragusa, and I passed two days there before I knew or thought of inquiring in what country we were."

"I have the same admission to make," said Impéria; "and with Léon, that state of affairs lasted even longer, I will wager."

"Do you know," said Léon, "perhaps we dreamed of the shipwreck? Who is able to swear that what he sees and hears is real?"

"I once heard," observed Bellamare, "of a faith or religion or metaphysical theory of the ancient Orientals which taught that nothing except God has any existence. Our sojourn on earth, our emotions, our passions, our griefs and our joys—all was naught but a vision, the effervescence of some indescribable intellectual chaos: a latent world which aspired to exist, but which fell back again and again into nothingness, to be lost in the one and only reality, which is God."

"I don't understand what you are talking about," said Régine, "but I give you my word that I didn't dream of my hunger and thirst on that accursed reef. Whenever I think of it, I feel as if a bell were ringing in my stomach."

We reached Trieste without seeing the reef. There we made investigations and asked questions. After inspecting divers charts, we concluded, and people told us, that we must have struck on the *scoglio pomo*, well out at sea, or on the Lagostini, nearer Ragusa; but we were destined to remain in everlasting uncertainty, especially as a

scientific man gave us another version which was more agreeable to our excited imaginations. According to him, as our shipwreck coincided with the earthquake which had been felt on the shores of Illyria, the unfindable reef must have been spontaneously thrown up by the sea, and then have sunk again at once. On that theory, not only had we been threatened with death by cold and starvation, but we might have disappeared at any moment in the *third basement*, like the villains and the demons at the end of an opera.

On leaving Trieste, where we played *Les Folies Amoureuses*, *Quitte pour la Peur*, *Les Caprices de Marianne*, and *Bataille de Dames*, we travelled through the north of Italy, joining forces with a French company, some members of which were passable. Those who were good for nothing swelled our numbers none the less, and we were able to enlarge our repertory and to attempt plays with many characters: *Trente Ans ou la Vie d'un Joueur*, *Le Comte Hermann*, etc. We did very well, and the public seemed very well pleased with us. But the profession lost much of its prestige for me. The new people were so different from our own set! The women had impossible morals, the men unendurable manners. They were genuine strolling actors, consumed by vanity, sensitive, vulgar, quarrelsome, unrefined, sottish. Everyone of them had one or two of those vices; there were some who could boast of having all of them at once. They were entirely unable to understand our mode of life, and laughed at us about it. I had been brought up with rough-mannered peasants; they were people of the utmost refinement compared to those creatures. And yet all those shortcomings did not interfere with their ability to wear a costume, to move about on the stage with a certain dignity and grace, and to conceal the hiccoughs of intoxication beneath a grave or melting air.

In the wings, they were positively hateful to us. Régine alone held them in respect by her supercilious mockery. At rehearsal, Lambesq threw properties at their heads. Moranbois kept some of them where they belonged by strength of wrist. Bellamare pitied them for having fallen so low by reason of extreme destitution and the weariness due to constant disappointment. He tried to raise them in their own estimation, to make them understand that the wretchedness of their plight was due to their own indolence, to their lack of conscientiousness in their work, and of respect for their audiences. They listened to him with amazement, sometimes with a little emotion; but they were incorrigible.

It was becoming evident to me that mediocrity on the stage inevitably leads to dissipation in the case of those who have not an exceptionally strong moral character, and I asked myself whether, without Bellamare's guidance, and the influence of Impéria and Léon, who were all three exceptional people, I should not have fallen as low as those unfortunate actors. The managerial staff of those strolling troupes was the worst of all. Almost uninterrupted failure kept them

in a perpetual state of insolvency. They made the best of it with degrading philosophy, and shrank from no breach of faith to retrieve their fortunes. They wondered by what miraculous means Bellamare, still a poor man, had preserved his stainless name and his honorable connections. It did not once occur to them that he had had no other secret for obtaining the support of men of honor than to be a man of honor himself.

We longed to part company with that heterogeneous element, and when we found ourselves at last in France, we felt as if we were relieved of a great burden. We replaced Marco by a pupil of the Conservatoire, who had been unable to obtain an engagement in Paris, and who had no individual talent, for he confined himself to imitating Régnier. Régine and Lucinde remained with us on a salary, and Lambesq requested to be admitted as a partner. We did not hesitate to admit him. To be sure, he had some incorrigible failings, unbounded vanity, childish sensitiveness, and a fondness for his own person which was most remarkable because of its absolute ingenuousness; but he had learned something in misfortune, and after angering us all at the time of the shipwreck, had rehabilitated himself at Saint-Clément and in the mountains. He had reflected upon the disadvantages of selfishness. His heart was not cold at bottom, and he had become deeply attached to us. He went so far as to propose marriage to Anna, for Anna had been his mistress and at that time had wanted to be his wife; but in the meantime she had loved several other men, and she declined, thanking him and promising to be a loyal friend to him.

Anna, who was not accustomed to speak of the past, opened her heart to me on this subject one day when we happened to be alone for a moment. I was anxious to know what she thought of Léon, and whether his stifled regrets had any real foundation.

"I don't like to look back," she said. "The past contains nothing but grief and disappointment for me. I am very impressionable, and I should have died ten times over, had I not in my nature one last resource, to forget. I have very often believed that I was in love; but I have never really loved anyone but my first lover, that madman of a Léon, who might have made a faithful wife of me, if he had not been suspicious and jealous beyond reason. He was very unjust to me; he believed that he was betrayed by Lambesq at a time when nothing of the sort was true; thereupon I gave myself to Lambesq from spite, and afterward to others from ennui, from the capriciousness born of despair. Mark this, Laurence: people joke about love when it can be called a mere fancy; but there are some fancies which are amusing, and there are some which are tragic, because they are founded on the terrors of memory and the horrors of solitude. So do not ever laugh at me; you do not know how you hurt me, because you are better than the rest of them and, not loving me, have never pretended to love me to make me commit one more sin! If Léon ever speaks to you of me,

tell him that my foolish, ruined life is his work, and that his distrust was my destruction. Now it is too late. I can do nothing now but forgive, with a mildness which is taken for indifference, and which will undoubtedly end in that.”

Our life became once more what it had always been before our catastrophe, a merry journey, without losses or profits, a mixture of feverish activity and time wasted, a season of good-fellowship, sown with petty quarrels and fervent reconciliations. That life, without rest and without time for thought, transforms our provincial actor, by slow degrees, into a creature whom we may look upon, not as a chronic drunkard, but as always between two sprees. The stage and travelling are as stimulating as spirituous liquors. The soberest of us were often the most irritable.

Early in the winter I received a letter which put an end to my artistic career and decided my future. My godmother, an excellent woman who deals in groceries here, wrote to me:

“Come at once. Your father is dying.”

We were then at Strasbourg. I barely took the time to embrace my comrades, and started. I found my father out of danger. But he had had an apoplectic stroke as the result of a violent shock; and my godmother told me what had happened.

No one in the little town had ever suspected the profession I had adopted. Our people do not travel for pleasure. They have no business away from home, all of them being descended from five or six families which have been settled here for centuries. The young men may go to Paris sometimes, but that is all. I had never acted in Paris, and our troupe—Bellamare’s *society* we called it—had never had occasion to go anywhere near my native place. So I had not even taken the pains to conceal my name, which was not so unusual as to attract attention, and was well adapted to my line of parts.

It happened however that a commercial traveller whom I had met in Auvergne during my vacation the year before, was at Turin when we were there, and recognized my face on the stage and my name on the posters. He tried to see me at the café where I sometimes went after the performance, but I did not go there that night. He left Turin the next day, and I had lost the opportunity to ask him to keep my secret in case he should visit Arvers again.

He was there two months later, and did not fail to inquire about me. No one could tell him where I was or what I was doing. Thereupon, whether he was naturally talkative or simply desired to reassure my anxious friends, he told them the truth. With his own eyes he had seen me on the stage.

At first the news caused only a dazed surprise, then came comments and questions. They wanted to know if I was earning much money and making my fortune. In Auvergne a man is judged by his success or failure in making a fortune. A profession which enriches a man is always honorable, one which does not is always degrading. The



commercial traveller did not fail to say that I was on the road which leads to death by starvation, and that, since I was so fond of seeing new countries, I would have done better to travel about selling wine.

In an instant, the news made the circuit of the little town and reached my father's ears before nightfall. You remember that he called bear-tamers and knife-swallowers actors. He shrugged his shoulders and called the people liars who slandered me in that fashion. He sought out the commercial traveller at this inn where we now are, and tried to find out what his story meant. Overjoyed to assume a little importance in the eyes of a horrified father and a bewildered population, our man rehabilitated me somewhat by saying that I did not juggle with little balls or walk the tight rope; but he declared that my livelihood was very precarious, that I probably was rapidly acquiring all the vices which a life of adventure engenders, and that it would be doing me a service to rescue me from a gang which was leading me to destruction or exploiting me.

My poor father retired, very sad and in deep thought; but he had such confidence in me that he would not write me what his first impressions were. With the patience of the peasant who knows how to wait for the grain to sprout and ripen, he determined to be guided by my next letter. I wrote to him every month, and my letters always tended to keep up his feeling of security. I had not told him of my terrible experiences, and I simply had to give him a good account of my studies without enlarging upon their nature and their object.

He recovered his confidence. I was a good son, I could not deceive him. If I was an actor, it was doubtless an honorable and judicious step on my part, which he was not competent to judge; but there was still a weight of sadness on his heart, and he was more assiduous in his attendance at church, to pray for me.

Although a true believer, he had never been pious. He became so, and the curé obtained complete ascendancy over him. Thereupon his anxiety gradually reawoke and was kept awake. The curé fought against his apathetic confidence, he represented me as a lost sheep, then as a hardened sinner; finally, one day he informed him that if he did not tear me away from Satan's clutches I should be damned, that I should come to a shameful, perhaps a horrible end, and that I should not be buried in consecrated ground, but thrown to the dogs.

That was the last straw. He returned home utterly crushed, and the next day they found him in his bed at the point of death. The sacristan, who was his particular friend, my poor godmother, who is a dear stupid soul, and Mère Ouchafol, who is a stupid villain, had contributed not a little by their foolish speeches and wild ideas to drive my father to despair and death.

When I found that he was out of danger, I swore that I would never leave him without his full and unqualified permission, and he returned to his spade. I enjoined silence on our foolish friends, and I undertook to make my father understand and accept my purpose to

be an actor. It was not an easy task; he had been stricken with deafness in his illness, and his ideas were not altogether clear. I saw that reflection fatigued him, and that his complete cure was retarded by some secret anxiety. I began to work in the garden and pretended to take great pleasure in the work; his face brightened and I saw that a complete revolution had taken place in his mind. In the old days, being determined that I should be a gentleman, he would not even let me touch his tools. Now, believing that I should be damned if I returned to the stage, he could see no hope of salvation and honor for me except in manual labor, and in the welding of my life to the same bit of ground to which he had welded his.

All my attempts were fruitless. He would never enter into the slightest discussion with me, but would hang his head, turn pale and go, crushed with grief, to his bed. That unalterable gentleness, that heart-rending silence, proved only too clearly the impossibility of his understanding me, and the invincible power of his one fixed idea, damnation. When a noble and loving heart like his has once admitted that hateful idea, it is closed forever.

The doctors had warned me of the probability of one or more recurrences, presumably serious, of his terrible disease. I did not choose to run the risk of hastening them, so I resigned myself to the inevitable; I became a gardener.

But I was most anxious to bid farewell to my other family, to Bellamare, and above all to Impéria. I learned by chance that they were at Clermont, and as I had left part of my belongings in their keeping, I easily obtained from my father leave of absence for a few days, to settle up my outside affairs, solemnly promising him that I would return at the end of the week.

I found the troupe in even greater straits than usual; they had not chosen to touch the last of my bank-notes, which I had left in the cash-box. I insisted that they should use them and repay me in small instalments when they were able, and without any sort of anxiety on that account. I declared that I did not need the money, that, as I was doomed to remain indefinitely in my village, I had more than sufficient means to meet my wants. I lied; I had absolutely nothing left. I would not confess it to my father, I would not ask him for anything more than the privilege of sharing his house and his bread as pay for my daily work.

But, before parting from Impéria, I was determined to put an end to the obstinate hope which I had never been able to overcome, and I asked her to listen to me attentively and without interruption, in Bellamare's presence. She consented, not without an anxiety which she could not conceal. Bellamare said to her before me:

"I know very well, my child, what he is going to say; I guessed it long ago. You must listen to him without fear, without prudery, and reply frankly, with no affectation of mystery. I do not know your secrets; I have no reason and no right to question you; but Laurence

must know them and understand them fully, and govern his future conduct accordingly. Let us all three go out into the country, and I will let you talk alone. I do not wish to have any opinion or to exert any sort of influence until Laurence has spoken to you freely and from his heart."

We went to a little wooded ravine, through which a stream of limpid water flowed, and Bellamare left us, saying that he would return in two hours.

Impéria produced on me the effect of a victim resigned to the painful trial of listening to a long-dreaded and utterly useless confidence.

"I see," I began, "that you have divined my secret, that you pity me, and that you will never love me; but a drowning man clutches to the very last at everything within his reach, and I am about to enter upon a life which will be the death of my intelligence unless I can carry into it a ray of hope. So do not consider it absurd in me to try to prepare for a shipwreck which may be more disastrous than the one we underwent in the Adriatic."

Impéria covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"I know," I said, kissing her tear-bedewed hands, "that you have a feeling of friendship, of genuine friendship for me."

"Yes," she said, "of deep, immense friendship. Yes, Laurence, when you say that I do not love you, you cause me horrible pain. I am not cold, I am not selfish, I am not ungrateful, I am not an idiot. Your affection for me has been most unselfish, you have never shown it to me except in spite of yourself, at infrequent moments of fever and excitement. When you told me of it with such fervor on the reef, you were mad, you were dying. Since then you have almost always overcome it, and held it in check so firmly that I have believed that you were entirely cured. I know that you have made every effort to forget me and to convince me that you had ceased to think of me. I know that you have had mistresses of a day, that you have thrown yourself headlong into distractions which were not perhaps altogether worthy of you, and from which you emerged depressed and almost desperate. More than once, without your knowledge, your eyes have said to me: 'If I am dissatisfied with myself, it is your fault. If you had just given me a ray of hope, I should have been chaste and loyal.'—Yes, my dear Laurence, yes, I know all that, and I could dictate all that you propose to say to me. Perhaps—if you had been faithful to me, without hope—But no, no, I will not say that, it would be too romantic, and perhaps not true; you would have been even more perfect than you are, you would have been a hero of chivalry, I might have fallen in love with you, and I should have had to conquer it or yield to it; the first would have meant a bitter disappointment to you, the other remorse and despair for me. Listen, Laurence; I am not free, I am married."

"Married!" I cried; "you married! That is not true!"

"It is not true in the letter; but in my own eyes I am irrevocably bound. I have pledged my conscience and my life by an oath which is my strength and my religion. I really love someone, and I have loved him for five years."

"That is not true!" I repeated angrily; "that fable is played out; that pretext will not work any more. You told Bellamare in my presence, in Paris, one day when I was sick and pretended to be asleep, that it was not true."

"You heard that?" she exclaimed, blushing. "Very well—that is an additional reason."

"Explain yourself."

"Impossible. All that I can say is that I must keep my secret, from Bellamare above all. He is the one to whom I lie, and to whom I shall continue to lie, as long as it is necessary. He is the one who might guess the truth, and I do not wish him to guess it."

"Then Léon is the man you love?"

"No, I give you my word of honor that it isn't Léon. I have never thought of him, and as there is no one left but Lambesq after him, I beg you to spare me the humiliation of defending myself, and to ask me no more useless questions. I have been frank with you, always; do not punish me for it by your distrust. Do not make me suffer any more than I am suffering."

"Very well, my friend, be frank to the end; tell me if you are happy, if your love is returned?"

She refused to reply, and I lost control of myself. That incomprehensible mystery exasperated me. I complained so bitterly, that I extorted a part of the truth, agreeing, alas! with what Impéria had told me, in a semi-serious tone, at Orléans, on the road to Villa Vachard. She had never revealed her love to the man who was the object of it; he did not so much as suspect it. She was sure that he would be happy when she should make it known to him; but that day had not yet come; she had two or three more years to wait. She desired to keep herself perfectly free and beyond reproach, in order to give confidence to that man, who was terrified by the thought of marriage. Where was the man? what did he do? where and when did she see him? It was impossible to induce her to tell. When I hazarded the conjecture that he was not far from the place where Impéria's father lived, and that she met him there every year when she went to see her infirm parent, she replied: *Perhaps*; but in a tone which seemed to signify: "Think so, if you choose; you will never guess."

I gave it up, but I did all that was possible for a man to do to show her how insane that romantic passion of hers was. She was not sure of anything in the future, not even of pleasing the man of her choice, and she was sacrificing her youth to a dream, to a determination which resembled a monomania.

"Very good," she retorted; "it also resembles your love for me."

From the first day, you have known that I loved someone who is absent. I said it aloud at the Odéon, the first time that you looked at me with eyes that expressed too much. I have repeated it at every opportunity, and it is true. As you could not have my love, you wanted my friendship. You won it and you have it now. You have been content with it for three years; you did not choose to exchange it for agitated scenes which would have made us miserable to no purpose. You know that I would have run away! You were happy with us, even through the greatest privations and the most painful experiences. We have all become warmly attached to one another, and you will agree that there were days, weeks, whole months perhaps, when we were so worked up, so excited, that you flattered yourself that you were nothing more than my Friend. At those times you would not have liked to see me exchange our chivalrous fraternal relations for the outbreaks, the passions and the caprices with which our poor Anna wears herself out. You see, my life is a life of one idea, like yours; a secret preference, a dream of the future has made both of us insane creatures who should understand and forgive each other. You say that I am your fixed idea; allow me, too, to have my own serious, incurable mania. We actors have no real social life; we are outside of all the conventions, good or bad, which reason suggests to prudent, orderly people. Their logic is not the same as ours. In vain does prejudice disappear; we form a separate society, and those who know us well would say of us that we and the mystical pietists are the last disciples of an extrasocial, extra practical, extrahuman ideal. To every man attached to society as it is, one might say: 'Where are you going? to what does this lead you?' Such a man, if he is in the act of doing some very foolish thing, pauses in bewilderment, and sees nothing before him but disgrace or suicide. We, when we are asked where we are going, reply with a laugh that we keep going in order not to stop, and our future is always full of phantoms which laugh louder than we. Discouragement seizes us only when we can no longer rely on chance. So do not tell me that I am mad. I know it well enough, for I have become an actress; and you are mad too, for you have turned actor. You felt that you must have an idol; I had that same craving long before I knew you. We met too late."

It seemed to me that she was right, and I argued no more; indeed, I was embarrassed when she asked me where we should be if I had succeeded in winning her love.

"Are you free? Do not you belong to a duty, a native place, a father, a different kind of work from ours? Did you not do an exceedingly foolish thing when you joined us, who have neither country, nor family, nor duty, outside of our *ambulatory sheepfold*? Did you not lay up a bitter sorrow for us, by giving us several years of your youth, knowing that you would be forced to leave us? What would you do with me now if I were your companion for life? I don't know whether you really have enough to live on, and that would make no difference

to me, provided we could work together; but could we? Could you even give me a place of shelter from which I should not be driven forth like a vagabond? Would not the lowest of your peasants consider that he had a right to despise and insult Mademoiselle Valclos the strolling player? You see that you should consider yourself fortunate not to have contracted obligations to me which you cannot carry out."

"And so," I replied, "I did not come to ask you for your hand; but I did believe that your heart was free and that you might say to me: 'Hope and come again.' My poor father, they say, has only a few years, perhaps months, to live. I propose to devote myself to prolonging his existence as far as possible, without regret or hesitation or impatience. I do not feel dismayed by my task. I will perform it, whatever my future may be; but you are my future, Impéria, and are you not willing that my devotion should aspire to a reward? I have often told you that I should at some time inherit a very small fortune, quite sufficient, however, to carry on our association and, perhaps, place it on a firm footing. I would gladly have entered into such a community of interests with Bellamare and his friends—"

"No," said Impéria. "Bellamare would not have consented. This is all in the air, my dear Laurence! Let us not mix the interests of society with those of Bohemia. Bellamare will never borrow except with the purpose to repay, and Bellamare alone can save Bellamare."

"At all events," I rejoined, "I might be allowed to continue to be associated with his destiny and yours. So you will not give me the hope of renewing our campaigns together and of being your brother once more?"

"At present, no," she replied. "You would suffer too keenly on account of the explanation we have just had together; but some day, when you have altogether forgiven me for not loving you—when you yourself are in love with another woman—but that other woman will not let you leave her, so you see that we are going round and round in a vicious circle, for, in the interest of your future happiness, you must needs break with the present, and do it without reservation. I should be very blameworthy if I should say anything different to you."

Every word that she uttered fell on my heart like a spadeful of earth on a coffin. I was completely crushed, and suddenly a violent reaction took place within me. I acted like the condemned man who breaks his bonds, that he may take at least a step or two before dying. I poured out my love with the vehemence of despair, and again she wept bitterly, saying that I was pitiless—that I was torturing her. Her grief, which was genuine and was almost suffocating her, diverted me for a moment. I convinced myself that she loved me, and that she was sacrificing herself to what she esteemed a cruel duty. Yes, I swear that she seemed to love me, to regret me, and to dread my caresses, for she withdrew her hands from mine, and although, at times, overcome by emotion, she hid her face on my shoulder, she instantly drew back,

terrified, like a woman on the point of weakening. She was neither deceitful, nor cold, nor coquettish. I knew it, I was sure of it, after so long and intimate an acquaintance and so many opportunities of seeing her noble nature subjected to so many tests. I was going mad.

"Sacrifice your oath to me," I said; "forget the man to whom you owe yourself; I will sacrifice everything to you. I will let my father die alone and in despair. Love is above all human laws, it is all in all, it can create and destroy everything. Be mine and let the world crumble about us!"

She pushed me away gently, but with a melancholy air.

"You see," she said, "how far a man goes when he listens to the voice of passion; he blasphemes and he lies! You would no more abandon your father than I would abandon my friend. We might perhaps forget them for a day, but on the next day we should part, to go back to them, and if we did not do it we should despise each other. Leave me, Laurence; if I listened to you, our love would kill our friendship and our mutual esteem. I swear to you that on the day when I lose my self-respect, I will wreak justice on myself, I will kill myself!"

She went to join Bellamare, who appeared at the end of the ravine, and I made no attempt to detain her. All was over for me, and I entered upon a phase of utter indifference to life.

Bellamare took Impéria back to the city, after asking me to wait for him; he had something to say to me. When he returned I was standing as if rooted to the same spot, in the same attitude, with my eyes fixed upon the stream, following its little ripples as they plashed against the stone, and wholly unconscious of my surroundings.

"My boy," he said, sitting down beside me, "will you, can you tell me what took place between you and her? Do you think that you have the right to tell me? I say again, I have no right to question her; having never been in love with her, I am not justified in demanding a categorical answer as you have just done. She has just told me the same old story, that she did not want to love, and yet—I am bound to tell you the truth—she is so wretched that it seems to me that she loves you in spite of herself. There must be some obstacle, which it is not in my power to divine. If she has confided a secret to you, don't tell me what it is; but if she has simply taken you for her confidant, take me for adviser and judge. Who can say that I may not overcome the obstacle and revive your hope?"

I told him all that she had told me. He mused, asked more questions, cudgelled his brain conscientiously, and could find no explanation of the mystery. He was really vexed; he, with all his intelligence and experience, saw in front of him, as he expressed it, a veiled statue with an undecipherable inscription.

"Well," he said in conclusion, "one must never say that anything is at an end. Nothing is ever at an end in life. One must never renounce an affection nor bury his own heart. I don't choose that you

shall go away from us crushed or hopeless. A man is neither a wall, the stones of which are broken upon the road, nor a pipe, the pieces of which are tossed into a corner. The fragments of an intellect are always good for something. You must return home and take care of your father; you must do whatever he wants, water his flower-beds, trim his fruit trees, and think of the future as something which belongs to you, which is due to you, and with which you will do as you please. You know that on the *accursed reef* I continued to make plans to the very last, and that they were carried out. Go then, my boy, and don't imagine that I accept your resignation as an actor. I am going to work for you, I am going to put Impéria to the question. Now I must and will know her secret. When I have learned it I will write to you: 'Stay away forever!' or else: 'Come back as soon as you can.' If she loves you, why, it will be easy enough for you to see each other from time to time without the knowledge of your people. There will always be some way, if your exile is to be prolonged, of making it endurable, were it merely by mutual confidence and the certainty of being united at last. Go then, without anxiety, your situation is not changed in any respect; this doubt which you have endured for three years you can certainly bear three weeks longer, and I will undertake to know your fate within that time at the utmost."

That excellent friend succeeded in restoring my courage to some extent, and I went away without seeing Impéria or any of the others again, in order not to lose what little strength of mind I still possessed. When I reached home, I wrote to him, begging him to spare me if he should acquire the certainty of my misfortune. "In that case," I said, "don't write me at all. I will wait; I will part with my last hope gradually and without a shock."

I have waited three weeks, I have waited three months, I have waited three years. I have ceased to hope.

One consolation I have had: my father has recovered his health, he is no longer threatened with apoplexy, he is tranquil in his mind, he thinks I am happy and he is happy.

I have renounced all my dreams of an actor's career, and, desiring to have done with regrets for good and all, I have become a working-man pure and simple. I have striven to become once more the peasant that I should always have been. I have never reproached my father for having sacrificed me twice, the first time to his ambition, the second time to his piety. He has no idea of his error, so he is innocent of it; I take my revenge by loving him more dearly. I have a craving to love; my nature is that of a faithful dog. My father has become a child who is placed in my care and over whom I watch. Better still perhaps, I am by nature a lover, who must be always waiting upon or protecting someone; the old man has given himself to me, it is my task to watch over him and protect him from all sorrow, danger and anxiety. I am grateful to him for being unable to do without me, I thank him for having chained me.



You can imagine that this resignation did not come in a day; I suffered terribly! The life I lead here is the exact opposite of my tastes and my aspirations, but I prefer it to the paltry objects of ambition which have been suggested to me. I have refused to accept any sort of position; I will submit to no other chains than those of love and my own will. The chains which I wear chafe me sometimes till the blood comes, but I bleed for my father, and I do not choose to bleed for a sub-prefect, a mayor, or a collector of taxes. If I were a collector, my dear sir, I should look upon you as my master, and I should not open my heart to you as I am doing at this moment. Bellamare was right in saying that when a man has given himself to the stage he can never take back the gift. He can never again find a place in society; he has represented too many noble characters to accept the degrading employments of modern civilization. I have been Achilles, Hippolytus and Tancred, in costume and feature; I have lisped the language of the demigods; I could not stoop to be a clerk. I should feel as if I were acting in a burlesque, and I should be much worse as a public servant than as an actor. In Molière's time there was a line of parts thus described: "So-and-So represents kings and peasants." I have often thought of that contrast, which sums up my life and describes its fictitious character; for I am no more a peasant than I am a monarch. I am always a *déclassé*, imitating the life of other men but having no life of my own.

Happy love would have made of me a man and an artist at the same time. A fair lady dreamed of transforming me entirely; that was too much of an undertaking; she might perhaps have created the man, she would have killed the artist. Impéria refused to try her hand at either, as was her right. I love her still, I shall always love her; but I have sworn to leave her in peace since she loves elsewhere. I submit—not passively, for that is impossible except in appearance, but with a secret excitement of which I say nothing to anybody. It may be that there is in it something of the vanity of the strolling actor who loves high-flown rôles, but I act my drama uninfluenced by any audience. When my excitement becomes too intense I become the comedian, that is to say the poet, the leader of the revels and the singer of village ballads for my village friends. I drink now and then to drown my thoughts, and when my imagination indulges in too exalted flights, I pay court to homely maidens who are not exacting and do not require me to lie in order to persuade them.

This will last as long as my father's life, and I have had to lay down for myself a rigidly philosophical line of thought in order to avoid a sacrilegious longing for his death. So I never allow myself to think what is going to become of me after I have lost him. Upon my honor, monsieur, I have no idea, nor do I wish to have any.

That will explain to you how the man whom you saw half drunk at the wine-shop last night can be the same man who tells you to-day this ultra-romantic story. It is true in every detail, and I have told you

## HANDSOME LAURENCE

only its most striking vicissitudes, in order not to wear out your patience.

Laurence concluded his narrative and left me, postponing to the next day the pleasure of listening to my reflections. It was two o'clock in the morning.

My reflections were neither long nor harsh. I admired that self-sacrificing nature. I loved that noble and upright heart. I did not quite understand his persistence in loving a cold or pre-engaged woman. I myself was planted fairly in the midst of society as it is. I had not the romantic instinct; perhaps that is why Laurence's story had interested me so deeply, for interest always consists in large part of astonishment, and a story-teller who should keep wholly within his listener's range of vision would not entertain him at all, I am certain.

The only remark which I might have made to Laurence was this: "You certainly will not end your life in the same conditions to which you are now submitting. You will no sooner be free than you will return to the stage or try to make your way into society. Do not benumb your intellect by mere merrymaking, do not impair your wonderful constitution by dissipation."—But he so dreaded any mention of the future, the mere word caused him such instant distress, that I dared not even pronounce it. I saw plainly enough that his sacrifice was even more painful than he chose to admit, and that the idea of liberty, which could come to him only at his father's death, caused him the most intense terror and anxiety.

I simply ventured to say to him that, even though he should be a gardener all his life, there was no more necessity for self-debasement in that walk of life than in any other, and I was all the more eloquent because I had been taken by surprise the night before by unequivocal drunkenness. He promised to watch himself closely and to triumph over those moments of cowardice when he held himself too cheap. He thanked me warmly for the very genuine sympathy which I expressed; we passed two more days together, and I parted from him with a profound regret. I could not make him promise to write to me.

"No," he said, "I have stirred up the ashes on my hearth-stone quite enough by telling you the story of my life. The fire must go out forever. If I made a habit of stirring it from time to time, it would soon get beyond my control. I see that you pity me; I should yield to the temptation to complain, and I mustn't do that!"

I placed myself at his disposal if I should ever be in a position to do him any service, and I left him my address. He never wrote me, nor did he even acknowledge the receipt of a number of books which he had asked me to send him.

Eighteen months had passed since my trip through Auvergne, and I was still inspector of finances; my duties had summoned me to Normandie, and I was driving from Yvetot to Duclair one cold winter

evening, in a small hired carriage.

It was an excellent road, and although it was a very dark night, I preferred to arrive at my destination a little late to being compelled to rise early in the morning, the cold being always most intense at day-break.

I had been on the road about an hour when the temperature began to rise under the influence of a very heavy fall of snow. An hour later, the road was so completely covered that my driver, an old fellow somewhat inclined to be lazy, whose name was Thomas, had difficulty in keeping out of the fields. Several times his nags refused to go forward, and at last they refused so absolutely that we had to alight, clear the snow away from the wheels and take the beasts by the head; but it was useless, we were stuck fast in the ditch. Thereupon Monsieur Thomas confessed that we were no longer on the Duclair road, and that he believed he was on the road that goes back toward Caudebec. We were in a dense wood, on a deeply sunken road; the snow was falling faster than ever, and we were in great danger of having to remain there. Not a carriage, not a carter, not a passer-by to assist us or give us any information.

I was about to make the best of it, roll myself up in my cloak and sleep in the carriage, when Monsieur Thomas informed me that he knew where we were, that we were in the woods between Jumiéges and Saint-Vandrille. Those two houses were too far away for his worn-out horses to take us to either; but there was a château nearer at hand, where he was well-known, and where we should be hospitably received. I had pity on the poor man, who was as tired as his beasts, and I promised to look after them for him while he went off through the wood to seek assistance at the neighboring château.

It was in fact very near, for in about a quarter of an hour he returned with two men and an extra horse. They quickly extricated us, and one of the men, who had the appearance of a farm hand, told me that we could not return to the Duclair road in such vile weather. We could not see three feet ahead.

"My master would be very angry," he said, "if I didn't bring you to have supper and sleep at the château,"

"Who is your master, my friend?"

"Baron Laurence," was the reply.

"What?" I cried, "Baron Laurence, the deputy?"

"It is his château which you would see from here, if we could see anything. Come, it isn't wise to stay here. The horses are in a sweat."

"Go first," I said; "I will follow you."

As the road was very narrow, I did actually follow the carriage and the men, and I was unable to ask any further questions about Baron Laurence; but he was surely my friend the actor's uncle. There was but one Laurence in the Chamber, and so marvelled at the chance which led me to the abode of that potentate of the family. I was determined to see him, to inform him as to his nephew's plight, to tell

him what I thought of that young man, and to argue the matter out with him if he disagreed with me.

The snow, which did not abate in the least, made it impossible for me to see the house. It seemed to me that we crossed narrow courtyards surrounded by high buildings. I ascended a handsome flight of steps and found myself face to face with a valet of attractive appearance, who received me very politely, saying that an apartment was being prepared for me, and that meanwhile I should find a good fire in the dining-room.

As he spoke, he relieved me of my greatcoat, which was covered with snow, and passed a piece of flannel over my boots. A great door in front of me was thrown open, and I saw another servant engaged in placing divers appetizing dishes on a handsomely furnished table. An enormous Boulle clock was just striking twelve.

"I presume that monsieur le baron has retired," I said to the valet, "and will not trouble himself to rise for an unknown traveller whom the bad weather brings to his door. Be good enough to hand him my card to-morrow morning, and if he will allow me to thank him—"

"Monsieur le baron has not retired," replied the servant; "this is his supper hour, and I shall take him monsieur's card at once."

He ushered me into the dining-room and disappeared. The other servant, who was engaged in laying the table, courteously placed a chair for me by the fireplace, threw an armful of pine cones on the fire, and resumed his occupation without a word.

I was not cold; on the contrary, I was perspiring. I glanced at my surroundings. That great room resembled the refectory of an old-time convent. I made sure, on a closer examination, that the architecture was not a wooden imitation, but genuine Roman and monastic, a sort of offshoot, as it were, of Jumièges or Saint-Vandrille, the two famous abbeys which formerly owned the whole of the surrounding country. Monsieur le Baron Laurence had transformed the convent into a palace, precisely as Prince Klementi had done. The adventures of Bel-lamare's company came into my mind, and I was almost expecting to see Brother Ischirion or Commandant Nikanor appear, when the folding doors at the end of the room were opened, and a tall individual in a robe de chambre of crimson satin trimmed with fur came toward me with open arms. It was not Prince Klementi, it was not Baron Laurence; it was my friend Laurence, Laurence in person, a little stouter but handsomer than ever.

I embraced him joyfully. So he was reconciled to his uncle? he was the presumptive heir of his wealth and his title?

"My uncle is dead," he replied. "He died without knowing me or thinking of me; but he had neglected to make a will, and, as I was his only kinsman—"

"His only one? Your father—"

"Poor dear father!—he is dead too; killed by joy! stricken with apoplexy when a notary came and told him bluntly that we were rich.

He didn't understand that he had lost his brother. He thought of nothing but the brilliant destiny that had befallen me, the only hope, the only preoccupation of his life; the longing had become more intense with the fear of my damnation. He threw himself into my arms, crying: 'Now you are a nobleman, you will never be an actor any more! Now I can die!' And he died! You see, my friend, that this fortune has cost me very dear! But we will talk at our leisure; you must be tired and cold. Let us have supper, and I will keep you as long as possible. I long to talk with you, to look myself over with you and see where I am, for since our first acquaintance and our separation I have not had an hour of unconstrained outpouring of the heart."

When we were seated at the table, he dismissed his servants.

"My friends," he said, "you know that I like to sit up late, but not to keep others up. Put whatever we need within reach, make sure that my guest's apartment is supplied with everything, and go to bed, if you choose."

"At what time shall I wake monsieur le baron's guest?" said the valet de chambre.

"You will let him sleep," replied Laurence, "and you will not call me monsieur le baron again. I have already asked you not to give me a title which doesn't belong to me."

The valet sighed as he left the room.

"You see," said Laurence when we were alone, "my disguise lacks nothing, not even stage servants. These fellows consider themselves degraded by serving a man without a title and without pride of birth. They are great fools, who are more of an embarrassment than a help to me, and I hope they will leave of their own motion when they see that I treat them like men."

"On the contrary," said I, "I believe that they will gradually come to the conclusion that they are very fortunate to be treated so. Give them time to understand."

"If they understand, I will keep them, but I doubt whether they will become accustomed to the ways of a man who doesn't need any personal service."

"Perhaps you will become accustomed to being waited on. You are more aristocratic in appearance and manners, my dear Laurence than any châtelain whom I ever met."

"I am simply playing my part, my dear fellow. I know how one must act before the servants of a good family. I know that, in order to be respected by them, one must be very mild and very courteous, for they too are actors who despise what they pretend to revere; but make no mistake, those whom you see here are very ordinary strolling actors. My uncle was a sham nobleman; in reality he had all the absurdities of a parvenu who detests his origin. I saw that from the manner and the customs of his servants. Their vanity is of the third order; when they have left me, I shall engage some who are higher up in the scale, and they will look upon me as a truly superior man because I

shall play my rôle of *aristo* better than any *aristo* you ever saw. Is not everything fiction and comedy in this world? I did not know it, you see! When I took possession of this estate, I wondered if I could endure it here for a week. I was not so much afraid of being bored as of seeming to be out of place and of feeling that I was making myself ridiculous; but when I saw how easy it was to make an impression on society folk by a borrowed ease and dignity, I realized that my former profession of actor was an excellent education, and that young men of good family ought to receive no other."

Laurence indulged in more paradoxes, in a satirical tone which was not at all jovial. He affected a little too much disdain for his new position.

"Come, come," I said to him, "don't play a part with a man to whom you have laid bare all the recesses of your heart and your conscience. It is impossible that you should not be happier here than in your village. I say nothing of your father's death, which was inevitable according to the laws of nature; that sorrow is not so closely connected with your inheritance that it should prevent your appreciating its advantages."

"Excuse me," he said, "that loss and that gain are very closely connected; I cannot forget that fact. I said to you sincerely long ago, I say it no less sincerely today, I was born to be an actor. I had no talent for acting, but I have always had a passion for it. I long to be greater than nature. I must needs pose to myself, forget what sort of man I am, and soar in imagination above my own individuality. The only difference between the professional actor and myself is that he needs an audience, and that I, never having stirred my audience to frenzy, can do very well without one; but I must have my chimera; it has sustained me and enabled me to perform great sacrifices. I know that I am kind-hearted and honorable, but that is not enough for me, because it is nature that has made me so; I struggle constantly to be sublime by virtue of my own will. In a word, virtue is my rôle, and I do not choose to play any other. I know that I shall always play it, or else that I shall conceive a feeling of disgust and aversion for myself. You don't understand that? you take me for a madman? You are not mistaken, for so I am; but this madness of mine is of a noble sort, and since I must have something of the kind, do not take this away from me. In my village I was a true stoic, for everybody thought that I was happy there, and I certainly was not, except at rare moments, when I could say to myself: 'You have succeeded in being great.'—My father's life, his sense of security, which was my work, was the explanation of my sacrifice. I had reached the point where I no longer regretted the past. Now, what is there for me to do here which is worthy of me? To cultivate fine manners, to express myself more elegantly, to display a little more literary knowledge than most of those gentry who look me over and feel me in order to determine whether they shall accept me as one of them? Really that is too simple, and it is a goal which I feel

no very intense desire to reach."

I asked him whether his new neighbors were aware that he had been on the stage.

"Someone had told the story," he replied, "it had been repeated, but they were not quite sure about it, although they had once seen on the boards at Rouen a tall slim young man who looked very much like me, and bore the same name as monsieur le baron. Nobody had supposed then that I could be a relative of his, for he did not advertise his plebeian extraction. When I came forward as his heir, they questioned my servants, who knew nothing and who indignantly denied the insinuation. I was questioned more adroitly, and I made haste to tell the truth, with such a proud and determined air, that they made haste to tell me that I was *none the worse man for that*. A man who has a hundred thousand francs a year—for I have a hundred thousand francs a year, my friend—is not a nobody in the provinces; he is a power, beneficial or harmful as the case may be, and everybody about him has more or less need of him. I realized at once that I must either turn my property into cash and leave the province, or make an impression by an appearance of merit. That brought me back to my monomania, and I played the part of a man of merit without the slightest pains."

"Lay aside this jesting tone with respect to yourself, my dear Laurence. You were sincere and natural when you told me about your life, be so still. You are a man of heart and of a keen intellect; therefore you are really a man of merit. You insist upon appearing as you are; that is your right—nay, more, it is your duty. I cannot see anything about you which suggests the actor, unless it is this affectation of ridicule of the social position in which fate has placed you, which I am beginning to understand. The man who has given over his whole being, mind, face, feeling, heart and entrails, to the tender mercies of a public that is often unjust and brutal, has certainly suffered much from that direct contact, and his pride must have risen in revolt at the thought that the first clown who passes should buy the right to humiliate him by giving a few sous at the door. I confess that, before I knew you, I had the greatest contempt for actors. I forgave only those whose genuine talent gives them the right to dare anything and the power to overcome any obstacle. I felt a sort of disgust for those who were only passable, and I could not conquer that disgust except by dwelling on the compassion aroused by their misery, the difficulty of living in this world, the lack of early education, the glut of workmen in modern society. It is this constantly increasing difficulty of finding work unless one is remarkably well endowed, which combats and destroys the prejudice against actors, more than all the philosophical arguments, for at bottom the prejudice is well founded. To present oneself before an audience, painted and costumed as a clown or a hero, that is to say as a man who assumes the power to make a crowd laugh or weep, one

must be blessed with an audacity which is either courage or impudence; and whoever pays to see, certainly has the right, if the performance is bad, to shout: 'Off with you, you are not handsome, or you are not funny!'—Now, my dear Laurence, you say that you were passable, nothing more. So that you suffered because you were not in the front rank, and you tried to console yourself by saying to yourself, and justly, that in your case the man was superior to the artist; and now that you remember the coldness of the people on the other side of the footlights, you bear them a grudge unconsciously. You strive to treat them haughtily, as they treated you when you belonged to them. They did not consider you enough of an actor, and you long to tell them that their life is a comedy too, and that it is wretched and they are wretched. That is a commonplace remark which proves nothing, for in reality everything is horribly serious in the comedy of the world, and in the world of comedy. So forget this little spasm of bitterness. Be reconciled frankly to your return to liberty and social activity. You have a good excuse, an excuse of which you made me admit the validity, *love*, which is the great absolution of youth. That love of yours is forgotten, I suppose; if it is not, it can overcome all obstacles now, I suppose again. However that may be, you have nothing to blush for in the past, and that is why you should make your appearance in society, not as a repentant or suspicious deserter, but as a traveller who has taken advantage of his experience to judge all things impartially, and who returns home to reflect and act like a true philosopher."

Laurence listened to my little sermon without interruption; and as his heart was still the heart of a child in a manly breast, he held out both hands to me effusively.

"You are right," he said, "I feel that you are right, and you do me good. Ah! if I only had a friend with me! I am in such great need of one, I am so alone! Look you, my friend, my whole life is like an attack of vertigo, and I am still very young; I am not twenty-eight! I have lived through such widely different existences, that really I no longer know who I am. All is romance and adventure in this chequered life of mine. Really I have gone through enough to make me a little mad. Except for you I should have gone mad altogether, for, when you fell in with me in that wine-shop, I was in a fair way to become a village toper, perhaps a downright sot, given to melancholy and dreaming of suicide amid the fumes of cheap wine. Thanks to you I recovered control of myself, but my mental exaltation increased, and it was time to have done with it. Poor, dear father, forgive me for what I say!"

A tear came to the edge of his eyelid; he mechanically poured out a second glass of Malvoisie. Then he poured it into the ice-pitcher, and as I looked at him in amazement, he said:

"I do not drink now except when I am distraught and don't know what I am doing. As soon as I bethink myself, I abstain, as you see."

"And yet you sup like this every night?"



"Yes, the habit of an actor who loves to turn night into day."

"But at the village—"

"At the village I worked like an ox from early morning; but I rested like the others on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, and on those days I didn't go to bed. What could you expect! ennui? And yet I was a good workman. There is no sign of it now; see how white my hands are, as white and beautiful as when I used to play lovers' parts. That does not help me to enjoy myself. Ah! my friend, I am talking frankly to you, don't take this for affectation. I am so bored that I could swallow my tongue; I am bored to death."

"Haven't you been able to find any serious occupation?"

"Serious! Tell me what there is that is serious in the life of a millionaire of yesterday, who is still a stranger to the practical people among whom he lives? Do you suppose that I shall ever be practical? Is it in my power to be? Listen to the tale of my three months' sojourn in this château. But we have been long enough at the table. Come to my bedroom, we shall be more comfortable there."

He took a silver-gilt candlestick of an exquisite pattern, and, having led me through a gorgeous salon, an enormous billiard-room and a wonderfully beautiful boudoir, he ushered me into a bedroom, where I instantly exclaimed:

"The blue chamber!"

"What!" he said with a smile, "do you remember enough of my story, did my cursory description make enough impression on you for you to recognize things that you never saw?"

"My dear fellow, your story impressed me so deeply that I amused myself by writing it down in my leisure moments, simply changing all the names. I will read it to you, and if my recollections are inaccurate—if I have changed the coloring—you shall change and correct it and make it right. I will leave the manuscript with you."

He told me that that would give him very great pleasure.

"So this is the famous blue chamber?" I repeated.

"It is as exact a copy as my own memory permitted me to make."

"Does this mean that you are in love with the fair unknown again?"

"My friend, the fair unknown is dead; everybody is dead in the romance of my life."

"But the famous troupe—Bellamare, Léon, Moranbois—and she whose name I dare not mention?"

"They are all dead to me; absent, in America or somewhere else. Impéria, having lost her father, went with them to Canada, where they still were six months ago. Bellamare wrote me that on his return he would be in a position to repay me my money. They were all well. Let us not talk about them; it upsets me a little, and I am in a fair way to forget."

"God grant it! That is what I wish for you before everything else. But this blue chamber; is that a memory which you desired, which

you still desire to retain?"

"Yes; when I learned that my unknown was no more, her memory fastened on my heart again, and, like the great child that I am, I determined to rear this secret monument to her memory. You remember that that blue chamber was not hers, any more than the Renaissance house was, which I entered by mistake. Nevertheless, that charming abode, filled with poesy for me by a graceful and kindly apparition, was the only frame in which I could evoke her veiled image. I copied the room as best I could; but, as this one is larger, I was able to add some comfortable sofas, and we will smoke a good cigar."

I asked him how and from whom he had learned of the death of his unknown.

"I will tell you the whole story in a moment," he replied. "We must proceed in order. I resume my narrative; there will be only a short chapter to add to the romance you have taken the trouble to put on paper."

### III

After I had buried my poor father, I started for Normandie in the frame of mind of a man who travels about in search of novelty in order to divert his thoughts from a profound sorrow, and not at all with the excitement of a poor devil who has won a prize in the lottery and is about to be put in possession of his capital. I had retained a very unsavory recollection of my first and only visit to my uncle. He had not received me kindly, as you will remember—since you remember everything—and his housekeeper looked askance at me. I found the house as he had left it—that is to say, in an excellent state of repair. The old bachelor was an orderly mortal; not a slate was missing from his roof, not a stone from his walls; but the interior decoration was in execrable taste. There was gold everywhere, style nowhere. As the seals had been affixed, and as he had been arbitrary and suspicious to the very last, his housekeeper, who had not had so much influence over him as I supposed, had had no opportunity to do any pillaging. I found, in addition to a splendid house, some very productive farming land, affairs in excellent shape, and a handsome sum in hand. I dismissed the housekeeper, requesting her to carry away three-fourths of the sumptuous and hideous furniture; and yielding to an artistic caprice, to an irresistible longing to harmonize all parts of this monument of another age, I passed all my time arranging my domicile with taste, with science, in a word, with common sense, exerting my ingenuity to combine comfort with archaeological exactness. You shall see the result by daylight to-morrow; it has been very successful, I think, and it will be better when it is all finished. But I am afraid that, when I no longer have anything to do at home, I shall not be able to stay here, for as soon as I stop for an instant, I begin to yawn and long to

weep. I soon discovered that, if I wished to avoid much distrust and unpleasantness, I must respond to the courteous attentions which were shown me. I had taken a list of my uncle's friends and acquaintances. I had sent invitations to his funeral in my own name, as I was the only representative of the family. I received many cards, among them those of the chief bigwigs in the province. I ventured to pay visits. I was received with more curiosity than kindness; but it seems that I triumphed at once over all prejudices. I was considered to be a man of *good parts and of perfect tone*. It was known that in matters relating to my taking possession I had borne myself *en grand seigneur*. All my calls were returned. They found me engaged in putting a new dress on my old walls, and they realized that I was not an ignorant bourgeois. My good taste and my lavish expenditure proved me to be a scholar and an artist; my isolation put the finishing touch to my reputation as a serious-minded man. People had imagined that I would bring bad company to the neighborhood. What company could I bring? Actors? I did not know where to find a single one of those whom I had known in my wanderings. Workmen from my village? Unless I conferred pensions on them, I could not take them away from their work.

My neighbors had no idea of the extraordinary isolation into which I had been thrown by my exceptional destiny; they thought that I purposely abstained from good fellowship and from nocturnal merry-making. They were infinitely obliged to me for it. They invited me to make my appearance in local society. I answered that owing to my father's recent death I was still too low-spirited and unsociable. They admired me because I had loved my father! Some young men, my near neighbors, invited me to join their hunting-parties. I promised to do so when I was finally settled. When they set out for Paris at the beginning of winter, they were surprised that I felt no regret at not going with them; they would have introduced me in the best society. I had no desire to seem eccentric; I promised to become a devotee of society later—But my mind is made up, my dear friend! I have already seen enough of most of these people. Their life can never be mine. They are almost all empty-headed. Those who seem to me to have some intelligence and merit have contracted in their opulence indolent habits which would drive me mad. Those who are in the government service are mere machines. Those who have some independence in their ideas either make no use of their intellectual force, or use it bunglingly. One and all of them take seriously this non-cohesive, purposeless thing which they call society, and in which I can discover nothing that has any serious meaning. No, no, once more I say, do not believe that I distrust it of set purpose; on the contrary, I look anxiously for a luminous point to attract me and arouse my ardor. I see only a swarm of trifles, colorless, incomplete, unfinished. As yet I have seen only the rehearsals of the piece they are playing. It

is incoherent, incomprehensible, devoid of interest, passion, grandeur or gayety. The actors I have had an opportunity to study are incapable of disentangling it, for those who have any talent are scornful or blasé, or else they feel that their parts are impossible, and they act them lukewarmly. I, you see, was fed on noble tragedies and stirring dramas. Moreover, the most wretched work of art has a plan and aims to prove something; an evening party in society seems to have no other purpose than to kill time. What can a man do there who is accustomed to suit his actions to his words before an audience, to watch closely his exits and his entrances, not to say a useless word or take a step at random? To represent a definite act is to do something logical and reasonable; to say things of no consequence, which you forget as soon as they are said, to listen to tedious arguments which good taste prevents you from probing, is to prove your familiarity with society and your good-breeding; but it is to do nothing at all, and I shall never be capable of resigning myself to do nothing.

The moral of all this is not that an actor is too superior to reality to identify himself with it: don't put such nonsense as that in my mouth; but pray understand that any sort of artist has made of reality a mould which his own individuality occupies and fills. Where his imprint can no longer be seen, he no longer lives, he is petrified. I feel that I must live, not so that people may see who I am, but so that I may be conscious of living. For the moment I am an archaeologist, antiquary, numismatist; later I shall be a naturalist perhaps, or a painter, or a historian, or a sculptor, or a novelist, or an agriculturist, or heaven knows what. I must always have some passion, some task, some curiosity to satisfy; but I shall never be a deputy, or prefect, or soldier, or diplomatist, or politician, or treasury clerk—in a word anything that is called in these days of ours a practical man. I will see whether this house which I am making puts anything into my head; if not, I will leave it and take a long journey; but I am as much afraid of solitude in travelling as I am of idleness in a sedentary life. The thing which I need, which belongs to my life, which my heart invokes even though it dreads it, is love, a family. I would that I were married, for I shall never be able to make up my mind to marry. And yet the idea has come into my mind several times since I have known my neighbor, and it is time for me to tell you about my neighbor.

Her name is Jeanne and she has wavy brown hair. Those are her only defects, for they are her only points of resemblance to Impéria, whose name you remember is Jane de Valclos, and I would have liked to love a woman who did not remind me in any respect of her for whom I have suffered so much. In other respects the contrast is complete. She is tall and beautiful; the other was *petite* and pretty. She has not the measured voice nor the vibrating tone of an actress. Hers is a sweet voice, a bit low and husky, which caresses and doesn't cause one to start, a tone which convinces without emphasizing, and insists only when very much in earnest. I might very well say of this woman

that she is an instrument fitted with silken strings which are not resonant enough for an operatic orchestra but are much sweeter and softer in chamber music.

She is tall and beautiful, as I said, and I will add that she is a little awkward, which pleases me immensely. She could not take two steps on a stage without stumbling against everything. That is partly due to her nearsightedness, which makes it impossible for her to see things in detail with the naked eye. To my mind the source of the instincts and the taste is in the sense of sight. Those persons whose eye embraces everything are plastic; those on the other hand who need to look at things closely are specialists. My neighbor's specialty is domestic life, an activity which is not visible outside, but is ingenious and never-ending, a constant solicitude, watchful and delicate and inexhaustible, for those whose cure she undertakes. She is the exact opposite of me; I can practise self-sacrifice by a mighty effort of the will, but, when I come to myself, I can see nothing except through my own eyes. She forgets herself; she would take all the impressions anyone might choose to give her, she could actually be somebody else, see through his eyes, breathe through his lungs, become identified with him and disappear.

So, you see, she is the ideal companion, friend, wife. Add to this that she is free, a widow and childless. She is about my age. She is rich enough not to care for my fortune, and her birth is not different from mine: her grandfather was a peasant. She has seen society, but she has never cared for it. She means to leave it altogether, having never met anyone who has aroused in her a desire to marry again. She learned that the abbey of Saint-Vandrille was for sale at quite a low figure, and as she has sufficient taste and education to love to preserve beautiful things, she has come to pass a few months in the neighborhood, in order to find out whether the climate is suited to her health, and whether the surroundings promise her the quiet and retired life of which she dreams. The cottage she has hired adjoins my park, and we meet once or twice a week; we might meet every day; the obstacle, alas! is my cowardice, my memory of the past, my fear that I cannot love again despite the craving for love which is consuming me.

I must tell you how we became acquainted. You can imagine nothing more prosaic. I had been to Fécamp for a couple of days in search of a skilful mechanic to repair some wonderfully beautiful old wainscoting which had been relegated to the garret by my predecessor. As I returned quite late at night, I slept late in the morning, and I saw from my window that charming and lovely woman talking earnestly with the wood-carver, who was setting up his work in the open air, in front of the living room on the ground floor. She was dressed so simply that I had to look closely at her to recognize that she was a woman of high standing in the hierarchy of honorable women. I went down into the room which was to be wainscoted, and when I saw her shoes, her gloves and her sleeves, I doubted no longer. She was a

Parisienne and a person of great distinction. I went out into the courtyard, raising my hat as I passed her, and proposing to leave her to ask questions at her leisure, when she came toward me with a mixture of ease and timidity which imparted a great charm to her action.

"I owe an apology," she said, "to the châtelain of Bertheville"—that is the name of my abbey—"for the unceremonious way in which I came through the open gates."

"An apology!" said I, "when it is my place to thank you!"

"It is very kind of you to say so," she rejoined, with a playful good-humor which did not prevent her blushing a little; "but I will not abuse your kindness, I will retire, and, knowing that you are here, which I did not know before, I will not again take the liberty."

"I shall go away again at once if my presence prevents you from examining what I am having done."

"I have finished. I came to ask for some information on my own account."

I offered to give her such information as I had at my disposal as the owner of the property, and she saw at once that it was my purpose to be perfectly serious and respectful. So she did not hesitate to tell me that she wanted Saint-Vandrille, but she was appalled by the cost of making that ruin habitable. She had been asking my man what his price was for his work. There was a very beautiful wainscoting of the same sort at Saint-Vandrille, which also needed to be restored.

I had already seen Saint-Vandrille, but had not looked at it with any thought of determining what could be done with it. I offered to go there that same day and make a little plan, together with a rough estimate of the necessary outlay. She accepted with much gratitude, but said that she would send and get my plan and urged me not to bring it to her.

When she left me I was a little bewildered by her beauty and her air of frankness; I recovered immediately. I laughed at myself for my excessive civility, for I was about to waste my day and take a deal of trouble for a person who did not wish to see me again; but I had promised, and two hours later I was at Saint-Vandrille. I found my fair neighbor there; she came to me and thanked me for my promptness. I had made inquiries about her in the interval. I knew that her name was Madame de Valdère, that she usually lived in Paris, that she had recently hired a house very near me, that she lived quite alone except for an old housekeeper, a cook and a man-servant, not knowing nor wishing as yet to know anybody in the neighborhood; and that she passed her mornings walking and her evenings embroidering or reading.

Saint-Vandrille, like Jumièges, is a vast ruin in a small enclosure. Doubtless you are familiar with Jumièges. If not, fancy the church of Saint-Sulpice in ruins, gutted, in the centre of a pretty English garden with gravelled paths winding among lovely lawns, beneath arbors carpeted with ivy and enwreathed with wild plants. The two monumental

towers of the church rear their skeletons, as white as bones, against the beautiful Norman sky, which takes on such rich hues when the sun burns through the mists. Swarms of birds of prey fly incessantly with hoarse cries around those ruined donjons, whose jagged edges afford shelter for their nests. At the foot of the high walls of the roofless nave grow magnificent trees and graceful shrubs. In a corner of the former servants' quarters the present owner, a man of learning and taste, has fitted up a place of abode, of considerable extent and decorated in the best style. He has formed an interesting collection of objects found in the ruins. It is a severely simple, comfortable and fascinating dwelling, looking out upon a magnificent landscape enlivened and made fragrant by luxuriant vegetation so arranged as to add picturesqueness to the scene.

While examining Saint-Vandrille we talked altogether of Jumièges, the restoration of which was a masterpiece in my eyes, and might well serve as a model for Madame de Valdère's plans.

"I realize fully," she said, "that the purchase of these historic monuments carries with it grave duties. To restore them requires a princely fortune, and I cannot very well see wherein it would benefit art and learning, which have plenty of archaeological examples still standing. Nor, indeed, do I attach any value to a thing that is entirely remade, with new materials and by hands which have not the individuality of the past. When a ruin is really a ruin, we should leave it its relative beauty, its sublime air of desertion, its union with the plants which overrun it, and the solemn lesson it teaches. To preserve it from brutal devastation, to frame it with flowers and greenery, is all that one can or should do, and that part of my mission I can perform reasonably well, I believe. I love gardens, and I know something about them; but to take up my abode in this exacting neighborhood, that is what troubles me. And then," she added, "this kind of property involves a sort of servitude which terrifies me: one has no right to refuse admission to enthusiastic amateurs, and even to idlers and mee sightseers. The result is that one is not really at home; and what will become of me, with my fondness for solitude, if I can walk among my ruins only at risk of meeting Englishmen or photographers at every step? If we were at the gates of Paris, I could arrange to sacrifice certain days and hours to the public; but have you any right here to close the door to people who have travelled thirty or forty leagues to see a monument of which you are in truth only the keeper or the cicerone?"

I had no reply to make to this. I knew the impertinent insistence, the brutal fault-finding by which the inexhaustible courtesy of our neighbor of Jumièges was often rewarded. I advised Madame de Valdère to build a chalet in the middle of the woods, and to think no more of Saint-Vandrille.

I should have done well to stop at that judicious conclusion, dissemble my expert knowledge and take leave of her; but my passion

for archaeology led me on. Saint-Vandrille has a more beautiful and, in many respects, better preserved chapel than Jumiéges. The adjacent buildings are hideous and inconvenient; but there is a square garden built in terraces on a lovely hillside, and that monkish garden, laid out in the old style, was tremendously fascinating to my dreams as a conscientious decorator. There is also an immense chapter-hall, almost uninjured, surrounded by graceful arched alcoves. From a high gallery communicating with the refectory, you look down into the vast apartment. I fancied myself in the chapter-hall at Saint-Clément. I beheld once more the solemn conference of the prince and his vassals, the hurried and heartrending obsequies of Marco; then, as my hallucination followed its bent, I imagined that I was in the immense library where we had acted in tragedy before the Montenegrin nobles. I saw Impéria acting and singing in the *Marseillaise*, and, amid a confused crowd of ghosts and visions, Lambesq roaring the frenzied words of Orestes while I declaimed Polyeucte. Belamare's kindly, engaging face appeared in the wings, whence came Moranbois's cavernous voice *giving me the word*. Tears came to my eyes, a nervous laugh contracted my throat, and I exclaimed involuntarily:

"Ah! what a beautiful theatre!"

Madame de Valdère looked at me in alarm; doubtless she thought that I was going mad. She turned pale and trembled.

I thought it best, in order to reassure her, to make to her the declaration which I am in the habit of hurling at those who look at me with distrust or curiosity.

"I was an actor once," I said, doing my best to smile.

"I know it," she replied, still agitated. "I know your whole history, I think. Don't be surprised at that, Monsieur Laurence. I once owned a pretty little Renaissance house at Blois, number 25 on a certain street where there were lindens and nightingales. A strange episode, of which you were the hero, took place in that house. The heroine, who went thither without my knowledge or permission, although she was my friend, told me the whole story later. Poor woman! she died with the memory of that evening in her mind!"

"Died!" I exclaimed. "Then I shall never see her?"

"That is all the better for her, as you would never have loved her."

I saw that Madame de Valdère knew all. I pressed her with questions; she evaded them. The subject was a painful one to her, and she was not at all inclined to betray her friend's secret. I was destined never to know her name, or anything which could possibly enable me to find her track in an irrevocably closed and buried past.

"You can at least," I said, "tell me about her feeling for me. Was it serious?"

"Very serious; very deep-rooted and enduring. Did you not believe in it?"



"No, and I probably missed my chance of happiness through distrust of my good fortune; but did she suffer because of her love?—was it the cause—"

"Of her early death? No. Either she had never lost hope, or she recovered it when she learned that you had left the stage. Perhaps she was about to try again to attract you, when she died from the effects of an accident; her ball dress caught fire. She suffered terribly; she died two years ago. Let us not talk of her any more, I beg you; it is a very distressing subject to me."

"It is very distressing to me also," I said, "and still I would like to talk about her. In pity for me, have a little courage!"

She answered kindly that she should be concerned at my regret, if it were genuine; but could it be? Should I not naturally be inclined to despise beyond the grave a woman whom I had despised in her lifetime? Was I disposed to listen respectfully to what she should tell me of her?

I swore that I was.

"That is not enough," said Madame de Valdère, "I must know your secret sentiments concerning her. Describe the episode to me frankly from your standpoint. Tell me what opinion you formed of my friend, and all the reasons which led you to write to her that you adored her, only to forget her immediately and return to the fair Impéria."

I told her faithfully all that I have told you, omitting nothing. I admitted that there might have been a certain admixture of spite in my first impulsive movement toward her, and spite of a different sort in my silence when she doubted me.

"I was sincere," I said; "I had loved Impéria, but I threw myself into the new love with courage, loyalty and fervor. Your friend might have saved me, but she did not choose to do it. I should never have seen Impéria again, I should have forgotten her absolutely and without regret. Nothing would have been easier for me at that moment. The unknown showed a jealous disposition beneath a cloak of haughty and chilling generosity which humiliated me profoundly. I was afraid of a woman who was so exacting as to look upon it as a crime that I had loved before I knew her, and was so self-controlled that she could conceal her contempt beneath benefactions. I should have preferred a more artless jealousy; then I should have had at my command agitated words and heartfelt oaths to reassure her. I foresaw terrible conflicts, unconquerable bitterness stored up in her heart. In my pride I was cowardly. I renounced her! Moreover, her position and my own were too different. Now I should not be so timid and so sensitive. I should not be afraid of seeming ambitious, and I should find a way to overcome her distrust; but she is no more, I am fated never to be happy in love. She did not know how dearly I would have loved her, and I was spurned by Impéria, as if heaven had chosen to punish me for not grasping happiness when it was offered me."

"Yes," said Madame de Valdère, "in that respect you were very guilty toward yourself, and you cruelly misinterpreted a woman as sincere and loyal as yourself. My friend was entirely honest when she wrote to offer you her assistance with Impéria. She was neither distrustful nor haughty. She was crushed with grief, she sacrificed herself. She was not perfect, but she possessed the perfect candor of romantic hearts; in taking fright at her character, you made, if you will allow me to say so, the greatest blunder an intelligent man can make. She had a gentleness of disposition which bordered on weakness, and you would have governed that fancied awe-inspiring woman like a child."

"I was a child myself," I replied, "and I have been well punished for it!"

"Doubtless, since you have been attacked anew by love of Impéria, and that love has become an incurable disease."

"What do you know about it?" I cried.

"I saw it just now when you exclaimed: 'What a beautiful theatre!' Your whole past of illusions, your whole future of regrets were written in your eyes; you will never be consoled."

It seemed to me that that was a downright reproach, for that woman's eyes were moist and glistening. I took her hand with no very clear idea of what I was doing.

"Let us say no more of Impéria, or of the unknown," I replied. "There is no past for me; why should there be no future?"

I discovered to my surprise that I was on the point of making a declaration to *her*, and I made haste to add:

"Let's talk about Saint-Vandrille."

I offered her my arm to go down into the wild, abandoned garden, and we did not talk about Saint-Vandrille. We kept coming back to the unknown, and I fancied that I could see that by dint of talking about me and describing me to Madame de Valdère, she had aroused in the latter a very keen curiosity to see me, perhaps a deeper interest than mere curiosity. My neighbor seemed to me no less romantic than her friend, if not as adventurous, and I began to have a feeling that it would be very easy for me to fall in love with her if I received ever so little encouragement.

I received none at all, and I fell in love the more readily. I did not dare ask her to let me call; she shut herself up so closely for several days that I prowled about her house in vain, I could not obtain a glimpse of her. Then it was that I conceived the idea of transforming my uncle's bedroom into a study and of setting up my household gods in the square wing, which I would re-arrange to resemble the blue chamber at Blois. Now that I knew the real designer of that blue chamber, it became doubly interesting to me, and I began to work upon it from memory with much zeal. When, after a few days, it was beginning to resemble the original, I wrote to Madame de Valdère, requesting her to come to give me certain information and advice on the spot. I had been so civil to her that she thought that she ought not

to refuse. She came, was greatly surprised, yes, deeply touched by my sentimental whim, and declared that my recollection was very exact. Thereupon she gave me permission to call on her, and showed me my two letters to the unknown, which the latter had entrusted to her on her death-bed, telling her to burn them when she had read them.

"Why haven't you done so?" I asked.

"I cannot say," was her reply. "I have always had a feeling that I should meet you somewhere and have an opportunity to return them to you."

However, she did not return them to me, and I had no reason to ask for them. I asked her if she had not a picture of her friend.

"No," she said, "and if I had one I wouldn't show it to you."

"Why not? Her distrust prompted her; she forbade you—very good! I do not propose to love any longer in the past; I have had enough of it, I have been unhappy enough to expiate everything. I have a right to forget my long martyrdom."

"But the blue chamber!"

"The blue chamber is you," I replied. "It is you, the creatress and occupant of that chamber, whom I loved in my dreams before your friend appeared."

"Then it too is the past?"

"Why should it not be the present?"

She reproached me for coming to her house to say foolish things to her.

It was in bad taste, I agree; but what could she expect from a former stage-lover.

"Hush," she said, "you slander yourself! I know you perfectly well; my friend received letters enough from Monsieur Bellamare to enable her to form a just estimate of you, and I, having read those letters, know what sort of man you are. Do not hope to make me change my mind."

"What sort of man am I, in your opinion?"

"A man of serious mind and refined feelings, who will never pay court lightly to a woman whom he esteems; a man who concealed his love from Impéria for three years because he respected her. A woman who knows that, and who has any self respect, would not care to indulge in idle love-making with you, you must agree."

So I did not pay court to Madame de Valdère, nor am I paying court to her now; but I see her frequently, and I love her. It seems to me that she loves me too. Perhaps I am a conceited fool, perhaps she has simply a friendly feeling for me—like Impéria! Perhaps it is my destiny to inspire friendship and nothing more. Friendship is sweet and pure and delightful, but it isn't enough. I am beginning to be vexed by this confidence in my manliness, which is not so genuine as it appears, for it costs me dear. And this is what I have come to! A timid and distrustful, impatient and fearful lover, because—because—must I tell you all?—I am as afraid of being loved as of not being. I see

that I have to do with an absolutely pure and honest woman, who would utterly fail to understand a fleeting passion when she is free to give herself to me forever. I aspire to the good fortune of possessing such a woman and of loving her forever as I know that I am capable of loving. It rests with me to show her that my confidence is justified, by declaring my genuine passion for her, and I have been at that point for two months, like a school-boy who is afraid to allow his thoughts to be guessed and equally afraid that they won't be. Why? you will ask—

“Yes,” I exclaimed, “why? Tell me why, my dear Laurence! Make your confession absolute.”

“Ah! *mon Dieu!*” he replied, rising and pacing the blue room floor excitedly, “because I have contracted a very serious chronic malady in my wandering life: the habit of forming desires that cannot be gratified, the yearning for the impossible, disgust with the real, dreaming of the ideal with no definite purpose, thirst for what is not and cannot be! I still have the same dreams that I dreamed at twenty years; I still seek in empty space the things that have escaped me.”

“Artistic renown! is that what you mean?”

“Perhaps! I have harbored unconsciously some unsatisfied ambition. I fancied that I was modest because I meant to be; but my wounded vanity must have gnawed at my vitals like the diseases which kill you when you are not conscious of them. Yes, it must be that! I would have liked to be a great artist, and I am simply an intelligent critic. I am too cultivated, too logical, too philosophical, too much given to reflection; I was never really inspired. I can do a little of everything very well, but I shall never be a master in anything. It is a bitter thing to understand the beautiful, to have analyzed it, to know in what it consists, how it blooms, develops and makes itself manifest, and to be unable to produce it oneself. It is like love, you see! you feel it, you touch it, you think that you have it in your grasp; it eludes you and runs away. You are left with the memory of an ardent dream and a freezing disappointment!”

“*Impéria!*” I rejoined, “that means *Impéria!* You are still thinking of her!”

“Insensible *Impéria* and my disappointed ambition are all one,” he replied. “Those two first elements of vitality are the starting-point of my life. I wasted the three best years of my youth watching them slip away from me day after day, hour after hour. It may be that I shall find more valuable treasures, but what I shall never find again is my childlike heart, my persistent hope, my blind confidence, my poetic aspirations, my days of heedlessness and my days of fever. That is all at an end, at an end! I am a completed man and I love a completed woman. I am a good sort of fellow, she is adorable; we might be very happy together. Here am I as rich as a nabob and housed like a prince. I have passed from a pallet stuffed with straw to a bed of silk

and gold. I can gratify all my whims, get tipsy on wine that has been a hundred years in bottle, support a harem more luxuriously installed and more securely hidden than Prince Klementi's. I can have a better theatre than he, and a better company in my pay; my uncle has provided me with a subsidy of a hundred thousand francs, equal to the subsidy of the Odéon! I can have art for my money, as I have poetry by inheritance, and a beautiful estate where I can plant and trim at my pleasure. Look! is it not a romantic spot?" he added, drawing aside the heavy window-curtain and pointing to the landscape through the transparent glass, with the frost glistening diamond-like around its edges. "Look! I don't like blinds. There is nothing pleasanter than to look from one's chimney corner at the frost out-of-doors. The snow has ceased except for an occasional light flake which shines like silver in the moonbeams. Yonder, below my park, the Seine flows, placid but powerful, as broad as an arm of the sea. Those tall black cedars in the background shake noiselessly on the snow which covers their feet the masses of snow which cover their branches. See what a beautiful stage-setting in a deliciously soft light! it is imposing and solemn, gloomy and mute as a cemetery, dead—as I am! O Impéria!"

As he uttered that name, in a piercing voice which made the Dresden Cupids and Bohemian glasses rattle on the consoles, he stamped on the floor like a wizard evoking a recalcitrant spectre; everything rattled again, then all was still. He brought his fist down on a whatnot covered with valuable trifles and demolished it, then began to laugh and said with bitter sang-froid:

"Don't mind me; I often feel that I must smash something!"

"Laurence, my dear Laurence," I said, "you are more badly off than I thought! This is not a mere affectation, I see. You are suffering intensely, and you are treating yourself in the worst possible way. You must leave this solitude and travel, but not alone. You must marry Madame de Valdère and go away with her."

"If only my own interests were involved," he rejoined, "I would not hesitate, for she attracts me and I am sure that she has an affectionate and devoted nature; but what if I fail to make her happy, if my melancholy and eccentricities grieve and dishearten her! At this moment she is thinking solely of curing me of the past; I have ceased to conceal anything from her, she demands perfect frankness. All this that I am telling you, she has heard; all that I allow you to see, she sees; all that I suffer she knows. She questions me, she divines my thoughts, she makes me tell her all the details of my life, past and present. She shows deep interest in everything, she pities me, comforts me, scolds me, and forgives me. She is an angelic friend, she thinks that she is curing me, and I let her do what she will; and I imagine that she is curing me and I feel that she makes me calmer. She is not greatly disturbed by my relapses. Her patience is something incredible! In fact, yes, she is necessary to me, and I could not do without the balm she puts on my wounds; but I am afraid that my love

is selfish—detestable perhaps!—for if someone should knock at my door some morning and say: ‘Bellamare is downstairs with Impéria; they have come to take you away to act with them at Yvetot or Caudebec,’ I know that I should rush downstairs like a madman, jump into their carriage with tears of joy, and go with them to the end of the world. How do you suppose that with that madness in my brain I can swear to a loving woman to live only for her? Imagine her humiliation and despair when a carrier pigeon should come forth from the dove’s egg which she had hatched so fondly! No, I am not yet ripe for marriage, you must not tell me to hurry. You must give me time to bury myself and come to life again, if such a thing is possible.”

He was right. We parted at three in the morning, and it was absolutely necessary for me to continue my journey at seven; but I promised to rush my business and to return and pass a week with him.

I had been two days at Duclair and was breakfasting alone at the table d’hôte, having been unable to return at the regular hour, when there came into the dining-room a man, still young—that is to say not very young—and not very handsome—that is to say decidedly ugly—whose salutation, expression and smile prepossessed me in his favor. He sat down opposite me and ate hurriedly, apparently paying no heed to what was set before him, and constantly consulting a memorandum book. I took him for a commercial traveller. An indefinable suggestion of good-humor, satire and kindness in his appearance made me wish that he would speak to me; but he seemed to be too well-bred to begin a purposeless conversation and I determined to take the initiative by asking him something which I knew perfectly well—at what hour the steamer for Havre sailed.

“It passes at two o’clock, I think,” he replied.

Those few words were a revelation to me: he talked through his nose! A vague presentiment had already come into my mind, unnoticed. I was longing to ask him his name, when I saw him go to an inkstand and address an envelope which he took from his pocket. I was uncivil enough to glance at the envelope, and I read: *To Monsieur Pierre Laurence, Arvers.*

“I beg your pardon,” I said, “but in one of those fits of abstraction which it is impossible to explain I happened to glance at the name you are writing, and I think that I ought perhaps to tell you of something which you do not know. Laurence is no longer at Arvers.”

He looked at me with a penetrating glance, raising his eyes without raising his head, and having satisfied himself that he had never seen me, but that I had an honest face, he requested me to be kind enough to give him Laurence’s present address.

“He is known as Baron Laurence hereabout; but he doesn’t like to have anyone give him that title, because he did not inherit it by direct descent. He is living at his château, the château of his late uncle, only a few hours’ journey from here.”

“So he has come into some property?”

## HANDSOME LAURENCE

"He has, indeed; he has a hundred thousand francs a year."

"How he will laugh at my letter! Never mind; kindly tell me the name of his château."

"Bertheville."

"Ah I yes, I remember," said the good-humored fellow, smiling from ear to ear as he wrote. "What a freak of fate! The dear boy! so he is rich and happy! He has well earned it!"

"Perhaps he is not so happy as you think, Monsieur Bellamare!"

"Oho! so you know me, do you?"

"As you see!"

"And he?"

"Is my friend."

"Oh! in that case—I know that you are inspector of finances, the inn people told me—perhaps you will be kind enough to take charge of this, a draft for five thousand francs, which I have owed him for years. I know that he will let me off from paying the interest."

"And the principal too. I give you my word that he will refuse to receive it! No matter; I know your delicacy of feeling and I will hand him your letter. Where can I send it back to you?"

"I don't want him to return it. If he is rich, he is certainly charitable. There are plenty of poor people poorer than I and my actors. But can't I see him? Would he refuse to receive his old friend, his former manager? Laurence's was one of the hearts that can't change."

"Dear Monsieur Bellamare, he would receive you only too warmly; but ought you to rekindle the fire that is smouldering under the ashes?"

"What do you mean?"

"May I ask you if Mademoiselle Impéria is still a member of your company?"

"Impéria? why, yes, to be sure! I expect her here in an hour, with the rest of my associates."

"Léon, Moranbois, Anna and Lambesq?"

"Gad! you know us all, don't you?"

"Laurence has told me the whole story of his life to the smallest details. Are Lucinde and Régine still with you?"

"No, they didn't go with us to America, where we have passed two years, organizing companies haphazard here and there, around our little nucleus; but my five partners have never left me."

"And is Purpurin still in your service?"

"Still; he will die by my side. Poor Purpurin!"

"Why so?"

"Oh! we have had many adventures—that is our destiny; among others, an encounter with savages, supposed to have been converted by missionaries and civilized, who attempted to scalp us. Purpurin left a little of his hair with them, and the skin with it. We arrived in time to rescue the rest. He got over it; but that little operation and the fright he got were not calculated to develop his intelligence materially. He

## HANDSOME LAURENCE

has had to give up prompting, which after all is not a misfortune—But tell me about Laurence. Does he still think of Impéria?”

“More than ever.”

“The deuce!”

“She never loved him, did she?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“And now?”

“She denies it, as always.”

“Why?”

“Ah! there you are! Why? I can’t tell you; perhaps it was the fear of a life which would not have suited her artistic tastes and habits.”

“But now that he is rich—”

“Do you think that he would marry her now?”

“I am very sure of it.”

Bellamare turned deathly pale and paced the floor in great agitation.

“To lose Impéria is to lose everything, for she has very great talent now, and by virtue of her courage, her affection, her self-sacrifice, her intelligence, she is the heart and soul of all our lives. To part with her would crush us, and as for myself—”

He paused, choked by an inward sob which he forced back as he strode about the room once more.

“Listen to me,” I said. “I agree with you that he should not marry Mademoiselle de Valclos. The unknown of Blois is dead, but—”

“Dead? What a pity!”

“But she has left a friend, a confidential friend, who loves Laurence, who lives near him, and whom Laurence would marry if he could forget Impéria. I am convinced that that marriage would be more suitable for both.”

“Tell me,” Bellamare interposed absent-mindedly, “when did Madame de Valdère die?”

“Madame de Valdère?”

“Ah! to be sure, her name slipped from my lips; but what difference does it make, as the poor unknown is no longer of this world! Her romance was so innocent; she was such an honest, chaste, good woman! You are not the man to betray her secret, I am sure?”

“No, indeed; but I cannot understand what you say. Madame de Valdère is not dead by any means; she is Laurence’s neighbor, friend, confidante—almost his fiancée.”

“Oho!—Ah! I understand—But no, stay! Have you seen this neighbor?”

“Not yet. I know that she is tall, lovely—”

“And very light-haired?”

“No, of light complexion, with brown hair, according to what Laurence tells me.”

“Oh! as to the hair, that’s of whatever color a woman chooses. What is her first name?”



"Jeanne."

"That is she! a widow? no children? quite rich?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Laurence told me all that."

"Well, it is she; I will take my oath that it is she! And Laurence doesn't guess that this friend of his unknown is the unknown herself, who has given it out that she is dead? That fellow will always be artless and modest to the point of blindness! Oh! this changes the situation very materially, my dear sir! Laurence is a man of lively imagination. When he learns the truth, he will fall in love anew with the woman he loved under such romantic circumstances. He will love the unknown; he will forget Impéria."

"And it will be much better so for him, for her, for Impéria, and for all of you."

"Yes, to be sure! We must tell Madame de Valdère that the pretence has lasted long enough, and that she must make herself known to Laurence, because there is danger in the air—because Impéria has returned. I have not given notice anywhere of my return. The provincial newspapers have not mentioned my name. I landed at Havre two days ago, intending to go to Rouen without giving any performances on the way. I will do even better; I will hurry through Rouen unobserved, and begin operations as far from here as possible. You must not mention our meeting to Laurence, nor speak of me; he may as well think for a few months longer that I am in Canada. Bring about his marriage to Madame de Valdère within a few weeks, and everything will be all right."

"Then you must be off at once. Laurence may come here to see me, for he frequently comes in this direction. He may appear at any moment. Then what would you do?"

"I would tell him that Impéria has married a millionaire and remained in America."

"But may not she appear at the same instant? Didn't you tell me that you expected her?"

"Yes, we were to stop here. I had to see someone in the neighborhood, a friend who doesn't expect me, and who won't know that I have been here. This much is sure, that I must go and meet my people before they enter the town. Adieu! and thanks! Allow me to shake hands with you and hurry away."

"Take back your money," I said, "as Laurence is not to know of our interview. You have time enough to settle that matter with him."

"True. Adieu once more."

"Do you forbid me to go with you? I confess that I have a frantic desire to see Moranbois, Léon—"

"That is to say, Impéria, eh? Well, come; you shall see them all, but don't mention Laurence to them."

"That is understood."

I took my hat and we both walked rapidly toward the country. Bellamare, spying a man with carriages to let, stopped and bargained

with him for a large omnibus, to which horses were harnessed in a hurry. We leaped in and started toward Caudebec.

"This omnibus," he said, "is to receive my partners and the baggage, which will be transferred on the high road, so that we shall not have to go back to the town. I will tell my comrades that the friend I wanted to see at Duclair no longer lives there, that the inn is wretched and very dear, and we will head for Rouen by way of Barentin, where we take the railway."

After a quarter of an hour's drive, during which I enlightened Bellamare fully as to the frame of mind in which I had left Laurence, we hailed another omnibus containing the company. Bellamare went to them to make the explanations we had agreed upon, and I set about assisting in the transshipment of the women and the baggage, in order to have an opportunity of scrutinizing all those characters of Laurence's *comic romance*, in whom I took such keen interest.

The first woman who jumped lightly and carelessly down to the snow-covered road was little Impéria. She was in truth very short and slight, this woman who had filled so much space in my friend's life. In her tight-fitting travelling-dress, with her hair tucked under her microscopic astrakhan cap, she had the appearance of a school-girl in vacation; but, on looking at her more closely, I saw that she was quite thirty years old, and that she had lost all her freshness. Despite her pure and regular features, I did not think her pretty. Blonde Anna was a little too stout to play *ingenue rôles*, and her cheeks, pinched by the cold, were of a very sickly hue. She carried a bouncing child in her arms. Moranbois, who was entirely bald and still wore an otter-skin cap, seized the opportunity to speak roughly to me when I offered to help him to carry a great box, which proved to me that the Hercules's strength had not diminished despite the lapse of years. Léon, very pale and closely shaven, looked to me like a sick, worn-out man. His features were of a distinguished type, and his extreme courtesy was in marked contrast to Moranbois's brutality. Lambesq was stout and ugly; he walked sideways like a crab and complained that he could still feel the rolling of the ship in his legs. Purpurin, the scalped, wore a false top-knot, borrowed doubtless from the properties of the troupe, which matched his hair very badly. In very truth they were not beautiful to look upon, those poor strolling actors, who had seemed such interesting and clearly defined types in Laurence's narrative. I had leisure to examine them while Moranbois, who kept the accounts, haggled with the drivers, threatening with one arm and carrying Anna's baby with the other. Impéria joined Bellamare, who expressed some anxiety about her health, and declared with a firm yet playful air that she was perfectly well and overjoyed to see the earth and the trees, after twenty-eight days at sea. She loved Normandie, she preferred the North very decidedly to the hot southern countries. She talked thus, close beside me, for several moments, and I under-

stood her charm and her power. When she spoke she was transfigured; her tired, drawn features recovered their elasticity. Her thinness vanished; her fine, transparent skin became tinged with a peculiar shade, half-way between marble and life. She still had superb teeth, and her eyes lighted up with a piercing brilliancy which might well become irresistible. She was one of those creatures who do not strike but fascinate.

Bellamare too seemed to me to have grown younger since I had first seen him; a few moments later Léon produced the same effect upon me. I thought that I could understand these results of a life of excessive nervous excitement. Such people have no age. They always seem younger or older than they are. As I watched them go away, I had a feeling that I would have liked to go with them, to study them more in detail, and then I felt deeply moved at the thought of their poverty and their uprightness. They apparently had not enough to pay for their carriage, and yet they brought Laurence five thousand francs!

I returned to the inn, where I found Laurence waiting for me. How far he was from suspecting that a thunderbolt had passed so close to him! That morning his thoughts were full of Madame de Valdère. After our interview of two days before, she had seemed to him depressed and discouraged. The trouble was that he himself, excited by the laying bare of his inmost thoughts to me, had displayed a more melancholy countenance than ever to her. Now he was afraid that she was secretly preparing to fly from him forever. He was frantic and desperate.

"Women," he said, "have nothing but pride; no genuine pity!"

He begged me to go and stay with him. I had no business to attend to except during a few hours of the day. He agreed to drive me back and forth every day with a team as swift as the wind.

"How delightful it is," I said to him, as we returned to Bertheville in a vehicle as supple as a bow, drawn by three horses abreast, "how truly delicious it is to fly over the snow and ice like this, with one's feet on a good warmer, and one's knees enveloped in silky furs!"

"And with a friend by one's side," he added, pressing my hand; "therein only lies the pleasure of a prince, and I was born a peasant. The jolts of a cart drawn by an old mule are better for the health. I can neither eat nor sleep now. Destiny is a scatter-brained creature who is always mistaken, pouring out her favors on those who ask nothing, and thwarting those who appeal to her."

That evening he took me to Madame de Valdère's and introduced me as his only friend.

"The only one?—Are Bellamare and Léon and—the others dead?" she asked, in an agitated voice.

"They are to all intent, to-day," Laurence replied; "I haven't thought of them once during the day, and I do not see why the days that are to come should not resemble this."

Madame de Valdère turned away to serve the tea, but I saw a

gleam of joy pass over her beautiful features. Laurence had not spoken extravagantly of her to me; her beauty, her freshness, her perfect figure, the penetrating charm of her face were incontestable. Her hair was naturally dark brown. Later, when I asked her why Laurence and Bellamare had said that she was light-haired, she told me that in those days she had adopted for some time the fashion of wearing gold powder, which was then just coming into fashion. That circumstance had assisted her to mislead Laurence's memory.

In an instant I saw that she loved him madly and unreservedly. I desired to be alone with her, but that was impossible without attracting Laurence's attention. I determined to write her a note on the spot. While pretending to draw in a sketch-book, I wrote these words which I handed her in secret:

"I cannot betray your secret without your consent. Tell Laurence the truth. You must!"

She went out to read the note, and returned somewhat perturbed in mind. She had not the experience and self-possession of her years, she was still as excitable and innocent as a young girl; Laurence was her first and only love.

She asked him for a book he had promised to bring her. He had forgotten it. He pretended that he had left it in his overcoat pocket, and left the room as if to fetch it from the reception room; but he went out of the house and ran home on foot, in the snow and the darkness, to get the book. We heard him shut the door.

"We are alone," said Madame de Valdère; "speak quickly."

I told her all that had happened during the day.

"Then they have gone?" she said. "Impéria will not see him, she will not know that he still loves her, that he is rich, that she can make him happy? I cannot consent to that. I do not propose to owe Laurence to a trick, to a falsehood, for that is what silence would be. If he is fated to love Mademoiselle de Valclos, then my destiny must be fulfilled. There is still time; he has promised me nothing, I have made no confession to him, given him no rights over my life. I will go away, then you will send for Bellamare's troupe to come here, and if that test does not turn me out of Laurence's heart, I will return. Tell him at once that he can overtake them at Rouen. He will go, I am very sure. Meanwhile I will remain at a distance until I know my fate. Whatever it may be, I will submit to it with courage and dignity."

She burst into tears. I fought against her determination to no purpose. However, I persuaded her to agree that Laurence should know his unknown before he was subjected to the decisive test. I induced her to go and put some gold powder on her hair and to put on a black mantle, so that she would look as when he had caught a glimpse of her from the blue chamber.

When she returned, fair-haired and veiled, I bade her turn her

back to the door through which Laurence would come, and I retired. I met him panting for breath, with the book in his hand. I told him that I had a severe headache and that his neighbor had given me leave to retire.

He returned very late; I had gone to bed. He came to my room and threw himself on my neck; he was drunk with joy and happiness. Bellamare was not mistaken. The man of imagination had resumed his normal existence. He adored two women in Madame de Valdère: the unknown who had made him dreamy and meditative, and the friend who had labored to cure him. He wanted to marry her the next day. He would have done it, too, if it had been possible.

Had she informed him that Impéria had been in the neighborhood? He did not say a word to me on the subject, and I dared not question him. I confess that when I saw how intoxicated Laurence was, and heard him forming plans like a lovelorn millionaire who proposes to gratify his idol's slightest caprice, I thought, with something of a pang, of the poor little actress who was travelling about over the snow-covered roads, gloveless and almost cloakless, in quest of hard and unremitting work, with no capital, no future except her talent, her nerves, her strong will, her forced smiles and tears. Hitherto I had worked pitilessly in her rival's interest. I surprised myself thinking that that rival had won her happiness too easily. When I was left alone, I was unable to go to sleep. I was worried by an indefinable feeling of uncertainty, asking myself if I had any right to do as I had done.

I dressed, and as I watched from my window a beautiful winter sunrise, I saw in the courtyard a man wrapped in a goat-skin coat, with a woollen cap on his head, who looked like a Seine boatman. He beckoned to me, I went down, and, on a nearer view of him, recognized Bellamare.

"Take me to Madame de Valdère," he said; "I must speak to her without Laurence's knowledge. I know that he went to bed late, and we shall have plenty of time. On the way I will tell you what brings me."

I pointed out the road, ran to get an overcoat and overtook him.

"As you see," he said, "I have doubled on my tracks. At Barentin I shipped my whole company for Rouen. I rode all night in a villainous stage-coach; but I was worried and feverish, I didn't feel the cold. I had resolved to do an unworthy, a cowardly deed—from sheer selfishness! I cannot do it. It would be the first such deed in my whole life. Impéria has sacrificed herself again for her friends. She might have obtained an engagement in Paris, have had great successes there and made her fortune, or at least have made sure of a comfortable and tranquil existence. There is more than one *sociétaire* at the Français who can't hold a candle to her. She declined, in order not to leave us. You know how she acted when Prince Klementi and his guests overwhelmed her with their gifts. You have surely guessed that when

she refused Laurence's love, it was because she chose to devote herself to us. That cannot last forever. She is thirty now. She is weak and worn out. Our little partnership will never make any money, our life will be a never-ending struggle. A few years more and she will succumb to the hard work, laughing and singing to the last; that is the way we actors end!—and now she has it in her power to have a hundred thousand francs a year and an excellent, charming husband, who still loves her, who will be happy to make her happy. And to think of my hiding him from her! No! I must not, I will not do it. I must see Madame de Valdère, for I solemnly promised her long ago to do my best in her interest. She must know that I abandon her cause, that I am bound to abandon it. She is a woman with a very great heart, I know; I have seen her more than once since the Blois episode, and I have always thought that I was justified in telling her to hope. Everything has changed since the time when Impéria dismissed Laurence with a pang of regret which it was impossible to hide from me. It was just after that that we sailed for America. So I have never seen the countess since. She was abroad then. I didn't know where to write to her. She must know all now, and, with her supreme delicacy of feeling, make her decision. So far as I am concerned, this much is certain, that I cannot and will not deceive Impéria any longer. After she knows the truth, it is none of my affair whether the two women fight for the heart of my former *jeune premier*, or whether the more generous yields to the other. I shall have done my duty."

I agreed with Bellamare too fully to contradict him. We caused Madame de Valdère to be awakened. She listened to us, weeping, and when we had finished she sat before us speechless, helpless, defenceless, and bewildered. She was weak, but admirable, for she did not utter a word of complaint. She thought solely of Laurence's happiness, and she finally expressed her conclusions thus:

"I know that he loves me, I am sure of it now. He told me so last night with such convincing passion that I could not esteem him if I doubted it; but his mind and heart have been sick so long that I should not be surprised if he escaped me again. I have no right to rebel against this fatality. I accepted it in advance when I took up my abode near him with the idea of making him love me for myself, without the aid of any fiction or poetic glamor. By representing myself as a friend of his unknown, I intended to discover and understand thoroughly the feeling he had had for her. I saw that it was nothing more than a fleeting emotion, a chapter of the romance of his roving life, although he spoke of her with respect and gratitude. Thereupon I feared that I might seem to him too romantic myself, if I betrayed my secret; and in order to give him a confidence in me which he had not had in her, I showed him that I was capable of being a disinterested, frank and affectionate friend. He understood it; but that friendship was still of too recent date to banish the memory of Impéria. I felt it and saw it. I intended to wait still longer, to retain my freedom with respect to

him, to make myself necessary to him, and not to confess the past until I should give him the future. I was compelled last night to betray myself. He was excited, intoxicated with passion—and I—was cowardly, I could not make up my mind to tell him that Impéria was close by. You come this morning and tell me that I must be perfectly sincere and carry out the test to the end. I tell you that you break my heart. I was so happy when I saw that he was happy at my feet! No matter, you are right. My conscience obeys yours. I will do whatever you wish.”

And again she wept bitterly and, as we say, with a full heart; the tears came to Bellamare’s eyes.

“Look you, dear madame,” said I, “I am not very sentimental and not at all romantic, and yet I feel that you are an angel—Laurence’s good angel in all probability; but, in your own interest, ought we to expose you to the risk of blame hereafter if he discovers the truth as to these three points: that Impéria has returned, that she is free, and that possibly she loves him? Are you not afraid that, on some day of spleen, some rainy day in the country—one of those days when one would commit a crime for nothing at all—he may complain of our silence, and of yours particularly?”

“It is not a question of my interest,” she said; “don’t give a thought to me! I am naturally loyal and placid; I am not of an exuberant disposition. I have waited a long while, and lived a long while on a dream which often vanished and returned; I travelled, I improved my mind, I recovered my tranquillity, I even made other plans, and if I have never succeeded in loving any other man than Laurence, it isn’t my fault. I would have been glad to forget him. Whatever happens I shall not kill myself, and I shall guard against violent despair. I shall have had three happy months in my life, and the few hours of pure and unalloyed joy of last night. What it is essential to know—what I am absolutely determined to find out—is this: which of us two, Impéria or I, will make Laurence happier?”

“But how shall we find out?” said Bellamare, whose perplexity had returned in full force. “Who can read the future? The one who will make him the happier will be the one who loves him the more.”

“No,” rejoined Madame de Valdère, “for she who loves him the more will be the one to sacrifice herself. Listen: we must find a way out of this no thoroughfare. I will see Impéria; I want her to explain her state of mind. I have a right to save Laurence from a fresh blow, if she loves him only a little, or not at all.”

“How can we arrange it without his finding it out?” said Bellamare. “Doesn’t he come to your house every day?”

“I have absolute power over him at this moment,” the countess replied. “He entreated me last night to fix a day for our marriage. I will send him to Paris to get my papers. I will instruct my notary, by telegraph, to keep him waiting two or three days for them. Go to Rouen and bring Impéria back, and promise me that you will tell her

nothing as yet. She must learn the truth from me—from me alone.”

Bellamare promised and started on the instant. I went back and woke Laurence, who hastened to her presence whom he already called his fiancée, and with whom he was desperately in love. She had the courage to conceal from him her agitation and her fears, and to make a pretence of yielding to his impatience. That afternoon he started for Paris.

During the night, the train which took him to Rouen passed the one which was bringing Bellamare and Impéria back to Barentin.

They arrived during the forenoon of the next day. I was awaiting them at Madame de Valdère's, intending to retire when they appeared.

“No,” she said; “Impéria doesn't know you, and would feel some embarrassment in speaking freely before you; but I am very desirous that you should be able to give Laurence a minute and faithful account of our interview. Go into my boudoir, where you can hear everything. Listen to us, and take notes, if necessary. I insist upon it.”

I obeyed. Impéria entered the room alone. Bellamare, not wishing to embarrass the frank exchange of sentiments of the two women, went up to the room which had been prepared for him. Madame de Valdère received Impéria by holding out both hands and kissing her.

“I presume,” said she, “that Monsieur Bellamare gave you some slight inkling of my purpose in wishing to see you?”

“He told me,” replied Impéria, in her clear firm voice, “that a charming lady, beautiful and learned and kind-hearted, had seen me once on the stage—I don't know where—and had deigned to conceive a liking for me; that that lady, knowing that I was in the neighborhood, wished to see me in order to make an important communication to me. I trusted him, and so I have come.”

“Yes,” rejoined Madame de Valdère, in a trembling voice, “and you did right. I have the very greatest esteem for you; but you are tired; perhaps it is too soon—”

“No, madame, I am never tired.”

“You are cold—”

“I am accustomed to everything.”

“Take a cup of chocolate which I have had made for you.”

“I see some tea, also. I should prefer that.”

“I will pour it for you; yes, let me do it. Poor child! what a rough life this of yours is for such a refined and delicate person!”

“I have never complained of it.”

“And yet you were brought up in comfort, even in luxury. I know your origin.”

“As you wish to be kind to me, let us not speak of that; I never mention it myself.”

“I know it; but I have the right to ask you one question: if you should become wealthy again, would you not gladly leave the stage?”

“No, madame, never.”



"Is it a passion, pray?"

"Yes, a passion."

"A passion that excludes every other?"

Impéria did not reply.

"Forgive me," continued Madame de Valdère, in an even more uncertain voice. "I am impertinent, but I have no other choice. It is my duty to question you, to obtain your unreserved confidence. If you refuse to give it to me—why, can't you see even now that you would make a mistake, that I am perfectly sincere? Come! don't take me for a person trying to make a convert; I have a very different purpose! I am the devoted friend of a man who once loved you dearly, and who, being now very rich and entirely free from obligation to anyone, may well love you still."

"You are referring to Laurence, madame; I learned yesterday, from overhearing the conversation of some people in the stage, that the former actor had inherited a great fortune."

"Ah! and then?"

"Then? Why, I rejoiced for him."

"And for yourself?"

"For myself? so that is what you wish to know? Well, madame, I didn't think of myself at all."

"You never loved him then?" cried Madame de Valdère, unable to restrain her joy. "I loved him dearly, and his memory will always be dear to me," replied Impéria firmly; "but I did not choose to be his mistress, and I could not marry him."

"Why not? Did you retain the prejudices of birth?"

"I never had any."

"Were you really engaged?"

"In my own mind, yes."

"Are you still?"

"Still."

The countess could contain herself no longer; she threw her arms around Mademoiselle de Valclos.

"I see, madame," said the actress, "that I am not the principal object of your interest in me. Allow me to reassure you entirely, and to tell you that another attachment separates me from Laurence forever."

"Very well; then save him, save me once for all; see him and tell him so with your own lips."

"What is the use? I told him with the utmost earnestness when we met last, at Clermont."

"But you wept then, and he believed that you loved him."

"Did he tell you that?"

"No, Monsieur Bellamare told me."

"Ah, yes I Bellamare also thinks that I loved him!"

"And that you love him still."

"He will soon be disabused; but tell me, madame—if my answer

had been the opposite of what it is, what would you have done?"

"My dear child, I had taken a mighty resolution, and I would have kept it. I would have gone away without a word of reproach, without a sign of weakness and with no resentment against you."

"You are the unknown of Blois?"

"Did Bellamare tell you?"

"No, I guess it."

"I am she; how do you recognize me?"

"By your generosity! This is not the first time that you have been ready to act in this way. Didn't you write to Bellamare? didn't you authorize him to tell me about you?"

"Yes. Did he do so?"

"He did it without telling me your name, which I heard to-day for the first time. In the stage, where I learned of Laurence's brilliant position, someone said: 'He will marry his neighbor, Madame de Valdère.'—Be happy therefore, without scruple and without alarm, dear madame. It gave me great pleasure to hear that. I love Laurence like a brother."

"Give me your word that it was as a brother that you wept for him."

"I see that those tears are still on your heart; my frankness must not fall short of yours. You shall know the whole story in a few words, for you know my whole life except the history of my secret sentiments."

"Tell me, tell me all!" cried Madame de Valdère.

Impéria reflected a moment, then told her story thus:

"You know how and why I went on the stage. Laurence has undoubtedly told you. I desired to support my father, and through all the vicissitudes of my life I succeeded down to his last day in giving him as many of the comforts of life as he was able to enjoy in the state of mild insanity into which he had fallen. I went to see him every year; he never recognized me, but I made sure that he wanted nothing, and returned to my duties with my mind at rest. I owe it to Monsieur Bellamare that I was able to perform that filial duty, and it is of Monsieur Bellamare that I am going to talk to you. When I first went to him, secretly, to ask him to make an actress of me, he was not an entire stranger to me. He had come to Valclos to arrange and direct a children's play which we gave to celebrate my poor father's birthday. I was twelve years old. Bellamare was still young. His comical ugliness amused me greatly at first; later, his wit, his kind-heartedness, his charming manner with the children, captured my childish heart and took possession of it forever."

"What!" cried Madame de Valdère, "Bellamare is the man you love? Is it possible?"

"He is the man," replied Mademoiselle de Valclos resolutely, "the poor man who has always been ugly, who will soon be old and will always be poor. Look at me; I shall soon be like him, for time has

wiped out many differences! When I was twelve years old he was thirty, and my eyes did not reckon the disparity. When he had made me rehearse my part and look after my gestures, and had encouraged me in a fatherly way by telling me that I was a born artist, I was proud beyond words, and the memory of the man who had told me the key to the riddle of my destiny made an enduring impression on my brain, like the touch of a mysterious spirit come from another sphere to warn me of my vocation. On the day that he left Valclos, the little fellows whom he had drilled for our play threw themselves on his neck. He was so good, so merry, he managed them so perfectly while amusing them, that they all adored him. He came to me and said:

“Don’t be afraid, Mademoiselle Jane! I won’t ask permission to kiss you. I am too ugly and you are too pretty; but my hand isn’t as ugly as my face—will you put your little hand in it?”

“I was excited; his hand was very beautiful. I forgot his face, I threw my arms around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks. He smelt sweet, for he has always been very careful of his person. His face was smooth and soft. From that moment he was never ugly in my eyes.

“When he had gone, there was much talk about him at our house. My father, who was a man of discernment, and very highly educated, was very enthusiastic concerning Bellamare’s intelligence and opinions. He spoke of him as a man of great seriousness of character, and considered him a genuine artist. Bellamare had much success in our province, where he was then giving performances. My parents often attended. One day I was allowed to go with them. He played Figaro. He was beautifully costumed and made up, full of animation, refinement and grace; I thought him charming. Even his defects, his wretched voice, pleased me. It was impossible for me to separate his physical disadvantages from his good qualities. He was frantically applauded. I was excited by his success; I was allowed to toss him a bouquet, with these words written on the paper round it: *Little Jane to her teacher*. He put it to his lips and looked at me with a touched expression. I was drunk with pride. My little cousins shared my intoxication; they knew the famous, applauded, triumphant actor! They had acted with him, they had talked familiarly with him, he had called them in all seriousness: *my dear comrades*. They could not be prevented from rushing into the wings to embrace him during the entr’acte. He gave them for me a photograph of himself in his beautiful Figaro costume, and said to them:

“You must advise your cousin to look at this ugly phiz when she is grieved about something; it will restore the desire to laugh.”

“He was very far from being grotesque in that part, and the hazard of photography had flattered him. I received it with great pride and treasured it with pious care; not only did he not appear ugly in my eyes, but I thought him actually handsome.

“Love is more precocious in young girls than is generally believed.

I was a child, I knew nothing of any disturbance of the senses; but my imagination was invaded by a certain type of manhood, and my heart was dominated by a preference. I made no mystery of it, I was too innocent for that. My parents were not at all disturbed: they attached no importance to my whim, and as they never mentioned Bellamare except to extol his probity, his talent, his literary knowledge, his tact, and the charm of his conversation, there was nothing to oppose my ideal.

"When the age of reason arrived I no longer talked about him, but I dreamed of being an actress and kept my own counsel. Each year we gave a new play for my father's birthday. Bellamare did not come again, but I did my utmost to act better and better. I was considered quite remarkable, I believed that I was, and rejoiced in the belief. I had no taste for any except theatrical literature, I learned and knew by heart the whole classical repertory. I even wrote some very foolish little plays, and I wrote stately verses, very awkward and halting I doubt not, but voted admirable by my father. He encouraged my inclination and never suspected the truth.

"You know under what painful circumstances I went to Bellamare to confide my woes and my projects to him. In that secret interview I saw that he was deeply moved; at first sight he had seemed to me very much aged. His melting and penetrating glance instantly made him young again in my eyes. Not until then did I realize the sentiment which he aroused in me, and I shuddered with terror at the thought that he might guess my secret.

"He would have loved me, loved me passionately, I know, now that I have seen him love other women; but his love was like a flash of lightning and vanished as soon as it was satisfied. Bellamare is a genuine artist of an earlier time, with all the intense qualities, all the artless failings, all the enthusiasms, all the ennui inseparable from a life of heedlessness and over-excitement. He would have loved me and betrayed me, relieved and assisted me, and forgotten me like the others. Even if I had won his love permanently, he would not have married me: he was married.

"I did not realize all this at first; but I was afraid of myself, and, recovering my self-possession, I displayed so much firmness in asserting my virtuous principles, that he suddenly changed his expression and tone. He swore that he would be my father, and he has kept his word.

"And I have always loved him, although he has made me suffer terribly by leading the life of a man of pleasure before my eyes, never mentioning his adventures—he has much self-restraint and modesty—but not always able to conceal his emotions. There were intervals of considerable length when I believed that I had ceased to love him and congratulated myself on having never confided my secret to anyone. My pride, too often wounded, was the very simple cause of my unfailing discretion. If I had confessed the truth to Laurence or to anybody

else, they would have laughed sneeringly at my madness. I could not make up my mind to be ridiculous. My silence and the obstinate persistence of my love have prevented me from being that. Bellamare, not suspecting the nature of my attachment, has never done me any wrong.

"Once only was the equilibrium which I have maintained seriously shaken. Laurence's love disturbed and distressed me. I promised to tell you all, and I will conceal nothing from you.

"The first time that I noticed him he did not attract me. When one has taken for one's chosen type, from childhood, a laughing and caressing physiognomy, handsome features with a melancholy expression, that slightly threatening look caused by a love held sternly in check, cause more alarm than sympathy. I was perfectly sincere when I said of Laurence that I did not care for handsome boys—I was touched by his devotion, I appreciated his noble character; but when you saw him at Blois I had absolutely no deeper feeling for him than for Léon, although he was a more agreeable companion and I liked him better. When he left us, I hardly noticed it. When I found him seriously ill in Paris, I nursed him as I would have nursed Léon or Moranbois. The poor nurse one another with none of that prudent reserve which the rich can maintain toward one another even on their deathbeds. We actors cannot often provide substitutes; we help one another personally, and perhaps we are the fonder of one another for it.

"You must have learned from Laurence what an expansive, familiar, trustful attachment among members of a theatrical company is born of the life they lead in common. We quarrel a good deal, and each reconciliation draws the fraternal bond tighter than ever; we wound one another for a mere trifle, we implore forgiveness almost too readily. Our society met with great disasters. You know of our shipwreck, of Marco's tragic death, our adventure with brigands, our triumphs and our reverses, our perils, our sufferings, all the sources of intense agitation which made of that friendship a sort of collective intoxication. It was at that time, on our return from that exciting campaign, that Laurence's love began to disturb me. I saw clearly that he had not conquered it, and that he still suffered from it. When he returned and told me so frankly, I had suffered on my own account during his absence. This is what had happened.

"Bellamare had unconsciously made me very angry. He had learned of his wife's death. He talked of marrying again in order to have a friend, a companion, a perpetual partner, and he ingenuously consulted me, informing me that he had thought of Anna. She was very young for him, he said, but she had had several love-affairs and two children. She must long for a quiet life, for she was naturally virtuous. With a good husband she would be virtuous cheerfully and without regret.

"I did not exhibit any vexation. I spoke to Anna, who roared with

laughter; she adored Bellamare, but as a daughter. What our beloved manager needed, she said, was a woman of Régine's age and make-up.

"I hung my head; but when I undertook to deliver this reply to Bellamare, he hardly knew what I was talking about. He had forgotten his whim. He laughed at the idea of marriage, he declared that he was incapable of having a faithful wife, because for that it would be necessary for him to practise what he preached. He said that when he spoke to me about Anna the day before, he was completely carried away by the husband's part he had just been playing in Emile Augier's *Gabrielle*. He had dreamed of having a family, for he adored children. That was why he thought of marriage *at least once every ten years*.

"It seemed to me that I was extremely foolish, and I felt deeply humiliated. I swore that he should never suspect my love. At this juncture, Laurence arrived, and his passion bewildered me. I felt that I was a woman, that I was alone forever in the world, that perhaps happiness lay within my reach, that refusal was unfair and cruel, that I was about to break the most generous, faithful and pure of hearts. I came very near saying:

"Yes, let us go away together!"

"But that lasted only an instant, for while Laurence was talking to me, I saw Bellamare wandering about in the distance, in a dejected attitude, and I said to myself that if I gave myself to another love, I must renounce, bury forever, the love which had filled my life with courage, honor, and love of work. I must never again see that man whom I had loved from my childhood, who had loved me so purely despite the lightness of his morals, who revered me as a divinity, and who did not love me because he loved me too well. He would never feel for any other woman the immense respect he had felt for me. And in what other woman's heart would he find such devotion, proof against every trial, as mine for him? When I spoke to another woman of loving Bellamare, she laughed! I alone was obstinate enough to long to be the companion of his poverty, the support of his old age, the rehabilitation of his ugliness. I alone, who had never aroused desire in him, knew the chaste, pious and truly great side of that easily influenced heart, ardently enamored of the ideal. I saw that his head was growing bald, his eyes sinking, his laugh becoming less frank and hearty, and that he was subject to moments of intense weariness which made his acting less emphatic, his attacks of nervous irritability more acute and at times capricious. Bellamare felt the first symptoms of discouragement, for he urged me to marry Laurence, and I was conscious of a sort of despair in his manner, like that of a father as he puts his only daughter in the arms of the husband who is to take her away forever.

"I saw the future, the company soon broken up, the partnership at an end, and Bellamare, left alone, seeking new associates and falling

into the hands of designing women and knaves. I knew that my influence over him and the others, the support I had always given to Moranbois's rigid economies, the gentleness with which I had allayed Léon's secret and always increasing bitterness, my remonstrances with Anna to prevent her from flying away with the first comer, had long been all that had held together that always wavering chain, the links of which I was forever patiently welding anew. And I proposed to leave that dear good man, that noble-souled artist, that loving father, that friend of fifteen years' standing, because he was not so young and handsome as Laurence!

"The thought horrified me; I cried like an idiot, unable to conceal my tears from the man whom my selfish instincts regretted and whom my firmness crushed; but while weeping before him, while sobbing on Bellamare's breast, who had no idea what the matter was, I renewed my solemn oath before God never to leave him, and I was consoled for Laurence's departure because I was satisfied with myself.

"And now that three more years have passed since my sacrifice, three years which certainly must have cured Laurence, and during which I have been more than ever necessary and useful to Bellamare, for I have seen him mature at last, take thought for the morrow from affection for me, deprive himself of empty pleasure, to nurse me when I was ill, abandon the intoxicating amusements which had held sway over him hitherto, fearing lest he should waste the personal means which he proposed to consecrate to me—in a word, act the part of a prudent and self-restrained man, the most impossible of all things for him, with no other purpose than that of being able to support me at need—is this the time for me to regret that I am not rich through another man's means? Should I declare to Laurence that I might have loved him after all, and return to him because he has inherited his uncle's fortune? Would you esteem me? and could he possibly esteem me? and should I not be ashamed of myself? No, madame, have no fear; I have studied Chimène too much not to have understood and adopted the Spanish motto: *Soy quien soy*. I remember too well that I had an honorable man for a father, to fail in dignity. I have loved Bellamare too dearly to lose the habit of preferring him to all men. You may tell Laurence all that I have told you, and you may add that I am sure of Bellamare now, and that I propose to offer him my hand at the first opportunity. And if it is true, if it is possible that Laurence still feels some emotion in recalling the past, be sure that he loves Bellamare too well to be jealous of one who was his best friend. Now embrace me without reserve and without apprehension, and be sure that in me you have the heart most devoted to your cause, most disinterested in view of your happiness."

"Ah! my dear Impéria," cried the countess, pressing her to her heart, "what a woman you are! In my days of pride, I often posed in my own eyes as a great heroine of romance! How far I have always been below you, vaunting myself on my ability to wait at a distance

and out of danger, while you consecrated yourself to the martyrdom of waiting, with the spectacle of disenchantment constantly before your eyes! When I was waiting, I knew that Laurence had returned to his village, and by sacrificing everything to his duty as a son, was purifying himself and unconsciously making himself worthy of me. And you, following the steps of the man you love, witnessed his shortcomings and shared his hardships and yet were not discouraged!"

"Let us say no more about me," said Impéria, "let us consider what you must do so that we may all be happy."

"I propose to speak to Bellamare," rejoined Madame de Valdère earnestly.

It was unnecessary. Bellamare had joined me in the boudoir. He had heard everything, he was like one suffocated by surprise; then, yielding suddenly to a wave of intense excitement, he rushed into the salon and cried, addressing Madame de Valdère and Impéria:

"O virtuous women! how cruel you unconsciously are! How many sins, how much degradation you would spare us if you would but take us for what we really are in love—children ready to respond to the impulse that is given them! Impéria! Impéria I if I had suspected this earlier! This is what it is to be too much on one's guard against conceit! this is what it is to be neither fatuous, nor egotistical, nor of a calculating turn! How you have punished me for it, you who might with a word have made me worthy of you ten years ago! And now I am old, now I am unworthy perhaps of the happiness you propose to bestow on me! But no, do not believe it! I will not have you believe it. I will have things as they are! Ah! I have dreamed this dream a thousand times, and never dared tell it, and you never suspected it. I have loved you madly, Impéria, loved you unworthily, I agree, for I thought of nothing but forgetting it, or of resorting to every means to keep from loving you. I tried to marry you to Laurence, I tried to find distraction in pleasures which intoxicate and pass away. And you suffered when you might so easily have rescued me! In heaven's name, what is female pride? A grand and beautiful thing, I admit, but a torture of which we know only the severity and cannot see the utility. Confess that you doubted me too much—confess it, if you do not want me to despise myself for having also doubted too much!—And you, madame," he added, turning to the countess, "you have done as she did; this then is the romance of the generous woman! But I say it is not generous at all, since it postpones happiness for the benefit of some ideal or other which you seek in the zenith of life when it is within reach of your hand!"

"You are scolding us," said Impéria; "wouldn't any one say that we were the culprits, and you—"

"Hush! hush!" cried Bellamare, more and more excited; "can't you see that I am mad with pride at this moment, that I am trying to justify myself, to defend myself, and—something which never happened to me before—that I love and admire myself? Since you love



me, it must be that I am something grand and estimable. Let me imagine that I am, for if I should recur to my former idea of myself, I should fear for your sanity. Let me rattle on, let me be insane, or I shall burst!"

He continued to talk somewhat at random, like an actor who, finding his part pitched in too low a key to suit his emotional state, should unconsciously embroider it. It was easy to see that he had really loved Impéria more passionately than she had chosen to believe, and that the fear of ridicule, so potent in a mind adapted to represent ridiculous mortals, had paralyzed his impulses on all occasions. He ended by weeping like a child, and when I mentioned Laurence and attempted to agree upon something with Madame de Valdère, he confessed that he had lost his head, and must be allowed to think only of himself for a time. He fled into the woods, where we saw him rushing about and talking to himself like a maniac. I marvelled at that powerful, ardent emotion which, although so often kindled for the benefit of others, still burned in him as brightly as in a young man.

Five days later, Laurence returned to Bertheville. He found Madame de Valdère waiting for him there to give him a great surprise. He brought all the documents required for the impending proclamation of their banns. She would not allow him to talk of business or plans for the future; that evening was to be devoted to the happiness of seeing each other and talking over the past in sweet seclusion.

I arrived, as she invited me to do, at the close of dinner. Not only was I aware of what was in contemplation, but I had worked hard at it, and I was not to lose sight of Laurence while the countess left him. She had sent home for an exquisite dress, which she put on very quickly, and when she returned and asked Laurence to give her his hand and escort her to the salon, she was dazzlingly beautiful. A man was quite justified in losing his head and forgetting the interesting but poorly-clad Impéria. In the salon she said to him:

"I have played the mistress here in your absence as if I were already in my own house. You will take your coffee in the large room below, the complete restoration of which I have hurried forward. I was bent upon showing you that beautiful piece of work all finished, the last nail driven in the wainscoting, the floor polished, the old chandeliers in place and lighted. We have also tried the fireplace, which is a great success; there isn't a bit of smoke. Come and see, and if you are not satisfied with my management, don't tell me so; it would cause me too much pain."

We went down into the large room, as to which Laurence had not yet determined to what use it was to be put. It was an old council-hall, in no wise inferior to that at Saint-Vandrille. The architecture was so well preserved, and the woodwork so admirable in style and design, that he had attempted and succeeded in restoring it, with no other motive than sheer love of the work. He expressed satisfaction with the general effect, and did not ask why all of one end was cut off and

concealed by a huge green curtain. He supposed that it hid the scaffoldings which there had been no time to remove. The secret of our hasty preparations had not transpired. He really had no suspicion at all.

Suddenly a small invisible orchestra, which we had brought from Rouen, played a classical overture, and the curtain which concealed the end of the room was raised and disclosed another red and gold curtain surrounded by the front of a pretty little improvised stage.

Laurence started back.

"What is this, pray?" he said, "a play? I no longer care for it; I cannot listen to it!"

"It will be quite short," replied the countess. "Your workmen, whose affection you have succeeded in winning, conceived the idea of offering you this entertainment. It will be very ingenuous; be equally so yourself, be grateful to them for their good intentions."

"Bah!" said Laurence; "they will put on airs and be absurd."

He looked at the programme. It was a performance made up of fragments. They were to give the third, eighth, and ninth scenes of the fifth act of the *Mariage de Figaro*.

"Nonsense!" said Laurence; "these honest fellows are crazy; but I was such a vile Alaviva in my day that I have no right to hiss anyone."

The curtain rose. Figaro was on the stage. It was Bellamare in a dainty costume, walking about in the semi-darkness with inimitable grace and naturalness. I do not know whether Laurence recognized him at once. For my own part, I hesitated as to his identity. I was not accustomed to such sudden transformations. I thought that costume and paint were the whole secret. I did not know that the talented actor really becomes younger by virtue of some mysterious working of his inward feelings. Bellamare had an admirable figure, always supple. He had a well-shaped, elastic leg, a slender waist, small shoulders, a well-proportioned and well-set head. His red wig blended admirably with the more sober tint of the paint on his cheeks. His little black eye was a diamond of the purest water. His teeth, still fine, gleamed in the half-light of the supposed night on the stage. He seemed to me thirty years old at most, and perfectly charming. I dreaded to hear his unpleasant voice. He said the first words of the scene: *O woman! woman! deceitful creature!* and that comic voice, instinct with an indefinable but heartfelt inward sadness, was no more unpleasant than Samson's, who had moved me and stirred my soul so many times. He went on with his part. He spoke his lines so beautifully! That monologue is so delightful, and he had so shrewdly fathomed its meaning and understood it so well! I do not know whether I was influenced by all that I knew of the real man, but the actor seemed admirable to me. I forgot his age, I understood Impéria's persistent passion, I applauded enthusiastically.

Laurence was motionless and dumb. His eyes were fixed; he

seemed to be changed to a statue. He held his breath; he did not try to understand what he saw. The perspiration stood on his forehead when they passed to the eighth scene, and Suzanne entered and began her dialogue with Figaro. It was Impéria! Madame de Valdère was as pale as death. Laurence, divining her anxiety, turned to her, took her hand and held it against his lips throughout the scene. It is a rapid, warmly-colored love duo. The two friends acted it with much fire. Impéria seemed to have grown as much younger as Bellamare. She was full of energy and animation; you would have said that the poor tired creature had vitality to sell.

Lambesq came next and acted with more vigor than discrimination the wrath of Almaviva. Chérubin appeared for a moment with the features of Anna, whose precocious embonpoint seemed to have disappeared, she wore her page's costume so gracefully and prettily. Moranbois also appeared under the huge hat of Basile, which made his pale, seamed cheeks look even hollower than usual. They said but a few words. Léon had written a brief scene to take the place of the regular conclusion and mask the absence of the characters who were missing. Their only purpose was to show themselves in the flesh to Laurence, and to cause the roses of the past to bloom again for an instant amid the winter's snow. Léon expressed this affectionate, brotherly feeling in the name of all, in a few well turned and well delivered lines.

Thereupon, Laurence rushed toward them with open arms just as they leaped lightly over the railing to run to him. Madame de Valdère breathed freely once more when she saw that her fiancé embraced Impéria like the rest, with as much pleasure and as little embarrassment.

Laurence, when he saw the excellent creature kiss Madame de Valdère effusively, understood what had taken place between them.

"We heard of your happiness," said Impéria, "and we wanted to tell you of ours. Bellamare and I, after being engaged for a long while, decided while in America to be married as soon as we returned to France. So we are making this call to invite you to the wedding."

Laurence uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Upon my word," he said, "I thought of it twenty times!"

"And you couldn't believe it?" said Bellamare. "For my part, I never thought of such a thing in those days and I can't believe it yet. It is so improbable!—Are you jealous of my luck?" he asked in a lower tone.

"No," Laurence replied in the same tone, "you deserve it for the very reason that you did not seek it. If I were still in love with her, your happiness would console me for my pain; but the unknown has triumphed by making herself known; I am hers, hers absolutely and forever!"

The actors went to change their clothes. Laurence, at the countess's feet in the salon—which I bunglingly came very near entering,

but stole away unseen—blessed her touching confidence in him and swore that she should never repent it.

I went and prowled about the actors with some little curiosity. I met Impéria very well dressed in a party gown which seemed quite fresh, although she told me that it had played *La Dame aux Camellias* a number of times in New York. Seeing Moranbois in another room, I thought that I might go in, but stepped back in surprise when I saw Chérubin nursing her little one. The child interrupted the business in hand to laugh as he ran his plump rosy fingers over the page's doublet with gilt buttons.

"Come in, come in!" called out the disguised actress; "come and see what a beautiful boy he is!"

She took off his swaddling-clothes, and, raising him in her arms, covered with her naked child her naked breast, purified by that passionate embrace.

"Don't ask me who his father is," she continued; "the dear love shall never know, and he will be very lucky. He will have no one but me! The man to whom I owe this child, and who never gives him a thought, is an angel in my eyes, for he lets me have him all to myself!"

"Aren't you afraid," I said, gazing in admiration at the child, who was really a magnificent boy, "that this life of excitement will wear him out?"

"No, no," was the reply. "I have lost two whom they made me put out to nurse, on the pretext that they would be better taken care of. I swore that if I had the good fortune to have another, it should never leave me. Can a child be badly off in its mother's arms? This one was born under a gaslight in the wings, as I left the stage. He is always in the wings when I am acting, and he never cries; he knows already that he mustn't cry there. He is happy when he sees me in costume; he loves tinsel. He is wild with joy when I am in red, and he adores plumes."

"And he will be an actor?" I asked.

"Certainly, so that he need not leave me. Besides, even if it is the hardest of trades, it's the one in which we have the greatest happiness from time to time."

"Come!" said Moranbois, "go and change your dress and give me my godson."

He took the child, calling him affectionately a little *frog*, and carried him up and down the halls, singing in his false and cavernous voice some tune or other, impossible to recognize, which the little one however enjoyed exceedingly and tried to sing in his own way.

An exquisite and beautifully served supper kept us together from midnight until six in the morning. The brilliant colors of the Venetian glasses sparkled in the light of the candles. The hothouse flowers, arranged on a circular stand, encompassed us with the fragrant odors of spring, while the snow still lay on the park, which was brightly lighted by the full moon. We all talked at once, drank to all our memories,

then listened while Bellamare, with an incomparable charm which Laurence had in no wise exaggerated, described his American tour, a musical rehearsal at which they had sworn not to stop for a moment or to miss a measure while running the rapids of the St. Lawrence in a steamer; a night of revelry at Quebec when they supped by the light of the Aurora Borealis; a night of distress when they lost themselves in the primeval forest; days of fatigue and fasting beyond the Great Lakes; an unpleasant encounter with savages, and another with herds of bison; a great ovation in California where they had Chinamen for scene-shifters, etc. When he had long held us spellbound by these tales, he lured us to laugh and sing; then we paused to listen to the majestic silence of winter outside; and those moments of contemplation filled Laurence's whole being with a sense of repose, moral, physical and mental, whose solemn sweetness he appreciated at last.

Madame de Valdère was adorable. She enjoyed herself like a child; she used the familiar form of address to Impéria, who did the like to avoid grieving her. Bellamare was already an old friend to her, a tried and approved confidant. Between her and Impéria, those two irreproachable women to whom he had been a father, he felt purged, he said, of all his former sins.

Purpurin waited at table; he was disguised as a negro.

At the end of the supper, Laurence addressed Moranbois by his original sobriquet, which the Hercules allowed only his best friends to use.

"Where is your cash-box, Cocanbois?" he said. "I am still a partner, I want to see the inside of your cashbox."

"That's easily done," replied the treasurer, undisturbed. "We came here for the purpose of squaring your account."

He took from his pocket an enormous wallet, well worn and provided with a key from which he took five bank notes.

"I know your jocosé ways of old," retorted Laurence. "Pass me your implement."

He looked into the wallet. After taking out the amount brought to him, there remained three hundred francs.

O you everlasting *boulotteurs!*" laughed Laurence, "it's lucky that you acted decently to-night!—Come, my dear wife," he said to the countess, "go and bring our artists' box-office receipts for the performance; it is for you to calculate them."

She kissed him on the forehead before us all, took the key he handed her, disappeared, and returned in a twinkling.

When she had filled and stuffed the treasurer's wallet, there was something like two hundred thousand francs in the treasury.

"Not a word," she said to Bellamare; "my share is one-half; that is Impéria's marriage portion."

"I give my part of the receipts to my godson this day," said Moranbois, still unmoved.

"And I mine to Bellamare," said Léon. "I also have inherited

something from an uncle; he wasn't a millionaire, but I have enough to live on."

"And you are going to leave us?" said Bellamare, dropping the wallet in dismay. "O fortune I if thou dost disunite us, thou art good for nothing better than to light the punch!"

"I, leave you!" cried Léon, with a pale face, but with the air of an author who has found the *dénoûment* he wanted, "never! it is too late for that! Inspiration is an insane thing which demands an impossible environment; if I become a real poet it will be only on the condition of never becoming a man of sense. And then—" he added, with some embarrassment—"Anna, I think I hear your child crying."

She rose and went into the next room, where the child lay sleeping in its cradle, undisturbed by the uproar.

"My friends," continued Léon when she had gone, "the emotion of this night of friendship and intoxicating joy has been so keen in my case, that I long to open my heart which has been closed too long. There is a remorse in my life! and that remorse is called Anna. I was that poor girl's first love, and I loved her unworthily. She was a child without principles and without the reasoning faculty. It was my place, being a man, to give her a mind and a brain. I could not do it, because I did not choose to. I deemed myself too great a personage intellectually to perform a good deed of which I should have reaped the benefit. I was at the age of lofty ambitions, bitter enmities and absurd illusions. 'What is the sense,' I said to myself, 'of devoting myself to the happiness of one woman when all other women owe me happiness?' Thus does presumptuous youth reason. I have reached the age of maturity, and I see that women in other social circles are no better than in ours. If they have more prudence and self-restraint, they are less self-sacrificing and sincere. Anna might not have committed the errors she did commit, if I had been patient and generous; now that stray lamb is a loving mother, so loving, so brave, so touching, that I forgive her everything! I am not perfectly sure that I am the father of her child, but no matter! If I should return to society, to marry with that uncertainty would be absurd and scandalous. In the life we lead it is a good deed; whence I conclude that, so far as I am concerned, the stage is a more moral place than society. So I shall remain there and bind myself to this life beyond recall. You have often reproached me, Bellamare, for taking advantage of the weakness of a child and then despising her for that weakness, which should have bound me to her. I would never accept that reproach as just. I feel now that it was well deserved, that it was the starting-point of my misanthropy. I propose to rid myself of it; I will marry Anna. She thinks that my love for her has returned, but that I do not take it seriously, and that my never-ending suspicions will make our union impossible. She will not allow me to think that her child belongs to me. She denies it, in order to punish me for doubting it; very good, I do not choose to know anything about it. I love the child and I propose to bring him up. I

propose to rehabilitate the mother. I swear it in her absence, my friends, so that you may be my guarantors with her: I swear to marry Anna."

"And you will do well," cried Bellamare, "for I am sure that she has always loved you.—Come!" he added, addressing the dawn which, blending curiously with the moonlight, sent a gleam of bluish light through the flowers and the candles, "appear, sweet dawn, the most beautiful of my life! All my friends happy, and I—I! Impéria! my saint, my beloved, my daughter! so at last we are about to be true artists!—Hark ye, Laurence, if I accept the capital you offer to lend me—"

"I beg your pardon," said Laurence, "I hope that this time there will be no question of repayment. I know you, Bellamare—the everlasting obstacle in your life is your conscience. With a smaller capital than this I put in your hands, you could have come out with flying colors, if you had not always owed it to friends whom you did not want to ruin. With me you can have no such fear. My offering will not even embarrass me momentarily, and even if I should have to make some retrenchment in my too opulent manner of living—You gave me three years of a well-filled life which carried away all the effervescence of my youth, and of which I have retained nothing save the love of an ideal of which you are the apostle and the most persuasive and most thoroughly earnest professor. You trained my taste, you exalted my ideas, you taught me devotion and courage. All the youthful and generous spirit which my heart can boast, I owe to you. Thanks to you, I did not become a sceptic. Thanks to you I have a veneration for the true, confidence in the good, and the power to love. If I am still Worthy to be the choice of an adorable woman, it is because, in all the vicissitudes of a life as wildly improbable as a dream, I have said to myself: 'My child, when the angels pass through the dust we raise, let us fall on our knees, for there are angels, whatever people may say!' So that I am forever your debtor, Bellamare, and not with one or two years' income can I pay my debt to you. Money doesn't pay such debts! I understand you; you mean to be an artist, and not to ply a trade any longer. Very well, my friend, enlist a good company to round out yours, and always play good plays. I do not believe that you will make a fortune, there are so many people who prefer the degrading and ignoble; but I know you, I know that you will be happy in your mediocrity when you can serve the cause of good literature and apply worthy methods without sacrificing anything to the demands of the box-office."

"That is it!" cried Bellamare radiantly and with deep emotion. "You understand me, and my dear partners understand me. O ambition of my life! to be no longer compelled to make money in order to live! To be able to say to the public at last: 'Come to school, my little friend. If the beautiful bores you, go home to bed. I am no longer the slave of your big sous. We don't propose to exchange nonsense for bread. We have bread as well as you, my master, and we are quite

able to eat it dry rather than dip it in the smoke of your intellectual cynicism. My little public which makes big profits, understand that Bellamare is not what you think. We can do without you when you are sulky; we can wait for you to come back when the liking for the true comes back to you. It is a duel between us and you. You go on strike? so be it! we shall act much better before fifty persons of taste than before a thousand foolish creatures utterly without judgment.’— But, see that red beam on the ceiling which makes all our faces, fatigued with the past, look so sallow, and which, descending presently to our foreheads, will make them shine resplendent with the joys of hope! It is the rising sun, it is the splendor of the true, it is the dazzling flame of the footlights rising on the horizon to light the stage whereon all mankind is about to act the never-ending drama of its passions, its struggles, its triumphs and its failures. We, in so far as we are actors, are birds of night. We retire into the darkness of oblivion when the earth wakes and swarms; but here at last is a lovely morning which smiles upon us as upon real mortals, and says to us: ‘No, you are not ghosts; no, the drama you played last night is not a meaningless fiction; you have all grasped your ideal, and it will not escape you again. You may go and sleep, my poor workmen of fancy; you are men now like other men, you have powerful affections, serious duties, lasting joys. You have not purchased them too dear or too late; look me in the face—I am life, and you have a right to live at last!’”

Bellamare’s enthusiasm infected us all, and there was not one who did not think that happiness consists in the idea we have of it, and not at all in the way in which the future keeps its promises. I was as intoxicated as the rest, I who had had no other function and no other merit in this whole adventure than to devote my attention for a few days to hastening and assuring the happiness of the others.

When I found myself alone at last, several days later, following the prosaic course of my wandering life, that supper-party of actors in the former monastery of Bertheville seemed like a dream to me, but a dream so romantic and strange, that I promised myself that I would surely keep my promise to Laurence, and repeat it with the same companions as soon as circumstances should permit.

<sup>1</sup> From the Turkish, an archaic French term for “beautiful young boys.”